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History of the Conquest of Mexico

William H. Prescott



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CONQUEST OF MEXICO



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HISTORY
OF THE
CONQUEST OF MEXICO,
WITH A PRELIMINARY VIEW OF THE
ANCIENT MEXICAN CIVILIZATION ,
AND THE
LIFE OF THE CONQUEROR, HERNANDO CORTÉS .

By **WILLIAM H. PRESCOTT,**
AUTHOR OF “ THE HISTORY OF FERDINAND AND ISABELLA ,” “ HISTORY OF THE
CONQUEST OF PERU ,” ETC.



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"Victrices aquilas alium laturus in orbem."
LUCAN, *Pharsalia*, lib. v., v. 238.

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PREFACE.



As the Conquest of Mexico has occupied the pens of Solís and of Robertson, two of the ablest historians of their respective nations, it might seem that little could remain at the present day to be gleaned by the historical inquirer. But Robertson's narrative is necessarily brief, forming only part of a more extended work; and neither the British nor the Castilian author was provided with the important materials for relating this event which have been since assembled by the industry of Spanish scholars. The scholar who led the way in these researches was Don Juan Baptista Muñoz, the celebrated historiographer of the Indies, who, by a royal edict, was allowed free access to the national archives, and to all libraries, public, private, and monastic, in the kingdom and its colonies. The result of his long labours was a vast body of materials, of which unhappily he did not live to reap the benefit himself. His manuscripts were deposited, after his death, in the archives of the Royal Academy of History at Madrid; and that collection was subsequently augmented by the manuscripts of Don Vargas Ponce, President of the Academy, obtained, like those of Muñoz, from different quarters, but especially from the archives of the Indies at Seville.

On my application to the Academy, in 1838, for permission to copy that part of this inestimable collection relating to Mexico and Peru, it was freely acceded to, and an eminent German scholar, one of their own number, was appointed to superintend the collation and transcription of the manuscripts; and this, it may be added, before I had any claim on the courtesy of that respectable body, as one of its associates. This conduct shows the advance of a liberal spirit in the Peninsula since the time of Dr. Robertson, who complains that he was denied admission to the most

important public repositories. The favour with which my own application was regarded, however, must chiefly be attributed to the kind offices of the venerable President of the Academy, Don Martin Fernandez de Navarrete; a scholar whose personal character has secured to him the same high consideration at home which his literary labours have obtained abroad. To this eminent person I am under still further obligations, for the free use which he has allowed me to make of his own manuscripts,—the fruits of a life of accumulation, and the basis of those valuable publications with which he has at different times illustrated the Spanish colonial history.

From these three magnificent collections, the result of half a century's careful researches, I have obtained a mass of unpublished documents relating to the Conquest and Settlement of Mexico and of Peru, comprising altogether about eight thousand folio pages. They consist of instructions of the Court, military and private journals, correspondence of the great actors in the scenes, legal instruments, contemporary chronicles, and the like, drawn from all the principal places in the extensive colonial empire of Spain, as well as from the public archives in the Peninsula.

I have still further fortified the collection by gleaning such materials from Mexico itself as had been overlooked by my illustrious predecessors in these researches. For these I am indebted to the courtesy of Count Cortina, and, yet more, to that of Don Lucas Alaman, Minister of Foreign Affairs in Mexico; but, above all, to my excellent friend, Don Angel Calderon de la Barca, late Minister Plenipotentiary to that country from the Court of Madrid,—a gentleman whose high and estimable qualities, even more than his station, secured him the public confidence, and gained him free access to every place of interest and importance in Mexico.

I have also to acknowledge the very kind offices rendered to me by the Count Camaldoli at Naples; by the Duke of Serradifalco in Sicily, a nobleman whose science gives additional lustre to his rank; and by the Duke of Monteleone, the present representative of Cortés, who has courteously opened the archives of his family to my inspection. To these names must also be added that of Sir Thomas Phillips, Bart., whose precious collection of manuscripts probably surpasses in extent that of any private gentleman in Great Britain, if not in Europe; that of M. Ternaux-Compans, the proprietor of the valuable literary collection of Don Antonio Uguina, including the papers of Muñoz, the fruits of which he is giving to the world in his excellent translations; and, lastly, that of my friend and

countryman, Arthur Middleton, Esq., late Chargé-d'Affaires from the United States at the Court of Madrid, for the efficient aid he has afforded me in prosecuting my inquiries in that capital.

In addition to this stock of original documents obtained through these various sources, I have diligently provided myself with such printed works as have reference to the subject, including the magnificent publications, which have appeared both in France and England, on the Antiquities of Mexico, which, from their cost and colossal dimensions, would seem better suited to a public than a private library.

Having thus stated the nature of my materials, and the sources whence they are derived, it remains for me to add a few observations on the general plan and composition of the work. Among the remarkable achievements of the Spaniards in the sixteenth century, there is no one more striking to the imagination than the conquest of Mexico. The subversion of a great empire by a handful of adventurers, taken with all its strange and picturesque accompaniments, has the air of romance rather than of sober history ; and it is not easy to treat such a theme according to the severe rules prescribed by historical criticism. But, notwithstanding the seductions of the subject, I have conscientiously endeavoured to distinguish fact from fiction, and to establish the narrative on as broad a basis as possible of contemporary evidence ; and I have taken occasion to corroborate the text by ample citations from authorities, usually in the original, since few of them can be very accessible to the reader. In these extracts I have scrupulously conformed to the ancient orthography, however obsolete and even barbarous, rather than impair in any degree the integrity of the original document.

Although the subject of the work is, properly, only the Conquest of Mexico, I have prepared the way for it by such a view of the civilization of the ancient Mexicans as might acquaint the reader with the character of this extraordinary race, and enable him to understand the difficulties which the Spaniards had to encounter in their subjugation. This introductory part of the work, with the essay in the Appendix which properly belongs to the Introduction, although both together making only half a volume, has cost me as much labour, and nearly as much time, as the remainder of the history. If I shall have succeeded in giving the reader a just idea of the true nature and extent of the civilization to which the Mexicans had attained, it will not be labour lost.

The story of the Conquest terminates with the fall of the capital. Yet I have preferred to continue the narrative to the death of Cortés, relying

on the interest which the development of his character in his military career may have excited in the reader. I am not insensible to the hazard I incur by such a course. The mind, previously occupied with one great idea, that of the subversion of the capital, may feel the prolongation of the story beyond that point superfluous, if not tedious, and may find it difficult, after the excitement caused by witnessing a great national catastrophe, to take an interest in the adventures of a private individual. Solís took the more politic course of concluding his narrative with the fall of Mexico, and thus leaves his readers with the full impression of that memorable event, undisturbed, on their minds. To prolong the narrative is to expose the historian to the error so much censured by the French critics in some of their most celebrated dramas, where the author, by a premature *dénouement* has impaired the interest of his piece. It is the defect that necessarily attaches, though in a greater degree, to the history of Columbus, in which petty adventures among a group of islands make up the sequel of a life that opened with the magnificent discovery of a World,—a defect, in short, which it has required all the genius of Irving and the magical charm of his style perfectly to overcome.

Notwithstanding these objections, I have been induced to continue the narrative, partly from deference to the opinion of several Spanish scholars, who considered that the biography of Cortés had not been fully exhibited, and partly from the circumstance of my having such a body of original materials for this biography at my command. And I cannot regret that I have adopted this course; since, whatever lustre the Conquest may reflect on Cortés as a military achievement, it gives but an imperfect idea of his enlightened spirit and of his comprehensive and versatile genius.

To the eye of the critic there may seem some incongruity in a plan which combines objects so dissimilar as those embraced by the present history, where the Introduction, occupied with the antiquities and origin of a nation, has somewhat the character of a *philosophic* theme, while the conclusion is strictly *biographical*, and the two may be supposed to match indifferently with the main body, or *historical* portion, of the work. But I may hope that such objections will be found to have less weight in practice than in theory; and, if properly managed, that the general views of the Introduction will prepare the reader for the particulars of the Conquest, and that the great public events narrated in this will, without violence, open the way to the remaining personal history of the hero who is the soul of it. Whatever incongruity may exist in other respects, I

may hope that the *unity of interest*, the only unity held of much importance by modern critics, will be found still to be preserved.

The distance of the present age from the period of the narrative might be presumed to secure the historian from undue prejudice or partiality. Yet by the American and the English reader, acknowledging so different a moral standard from that of the sixteenth century, I may possibly be thought too indulgent to the errors of the Conquerors ; while by a Spaniard, accustomed to the undiluted panegyric of Solís, I may be deemed to have dealt too hardly with them. To such I can only say that, while, on the one hand, I have not hesitated to expose in their strongest colours the excesses of the Conquerors, on the other, I have given them the benefit of such mitigating reflections as might be suggested by the circumstances and the period in which they lived. I have endeavoured not only to present a picture true in itself, but to place it in its proper light, and to put the spectator in a proper point of view for seeing it to the best advantage. I have endeavoured, at the expense of some repetition, to surround him with the spirit of the times, and, in a word, to make him, if I may so express myself, a contemporary of the sixteenth century. Whether, and how far, I have succeeded in this, he must determine.

For one thing, before I conclude, I may reasonably ask the reader's indulgence. Owing to the state of my eyes, I have been obliged to use a writing-case made for the blind, which does not permit the writer to see his own manuscript. Nor have I ever corrected, or even read, my own original draft. As the chirography, under these disadvantages, has been too often careless and obscure, occasional errors, even with the utmost care of my secretary, must have necessarily occurred in the transcription, somewhat increased by the barbarous phraseology imported from my Mexican authorities. I cannot expect that these errors have always been detected even by the vigilant eye of the perspicacious critic to whom the proof-sheets have been subjected.

In the Preface to the "History of Ferdinand and Isabella," I lamented that, while occupied with that subject, two of its most attractive parts had engaged the attention of the most popular of American authors, Washington Irving. By a singular chance, something like the reverse of this has taken place in the composition of the present history, and I have found myself unconsciously taking up ground which he was preparing to occupy. It was not till I had become master of my rich collection of materials that I was acquainted with this circumstance ; and, had he persevered in his design, I should unhesitatingly have abandoned my own, if

not from courtesy, at least from policy ; for, though armed with the weapons of Achilles, this could give me no hope of success in a competition with Achilles himself. But no sooner was that distinguished writer informed of the preparations I had made, than, with the gentlemanly spirit which will surprise no one who has the pleasure of his acquaintance, he instantly announced to me his attention of leaving the subject open to me. While I do but justice to Mr. Irving by this statement, I feel the prejudice it does to myself in the unavailing regret I am exciting in the bosom of the reader.

I must not conclude this Preface, too long protracted as it is already, without a word of acknowledgment to my friend George Ticknor, Esq.,—the friend of many years,—for his patient revision of my manuscript ; a labour of love, the worth of which those only can estimate who are acquainted with his extraordinary erudition and his nice critical taste. If I have reserved his name for the last in the list of those to whose good offices I am indebted, it is most assuredly not because I value his services least.

WILLIAM H. PRESCOTT.

BOSTON, *October 1, 1843.*

NOTE.—The author's emendations of this history include many additional notes, which, being often contradictory to the text, have been printed between brackets. They were chiefly derived from the copious annotations of Don José F. Ramirez and Don Lucas Alaman to the two Spanish translations published in Mexico. There could be no stronger guarantee of the value and general accuracy of the work than the minute labour bestowed upon it by these distinguished scholars.—ED.

MAPS.—The maps for this work are the result of a laborious investigation by a skilful and competent hand. Humboldt's are the only maps of New Spain which can lay claim to the credit of tolerable accuracy. They have been adopted as the basis of those for the present History ; and an occasional deviation from them has been founded on a careful comparison with the verbal accounts of Gomara, Bernal Diaz, Clavigero, and, above all, of Cortés, illustrated by his meagre commentator Lorenzana. Of these, Cortés is generally the most full and exact in his statement of distances, though it is to be regretted that he does not more frequently afford a hint as to the bearings of the places. As it is desirable to present the reader with a complete and unembarrassed view of the route of Cortés, the names of all other places than those which occur in this work have been discarded, while a considerable number have been now introduced which are not to be found on any previous chart. The position of these must necessarily be, in some degree, hypothetical ; but as it has been determined by a study of the narratives of contemporary historians and by the measurement of distances, the result, probably, cannot in any instance be much out of the way. The ancient names have been retained, so as to present a map of the country as it was at the time of the Conquest.

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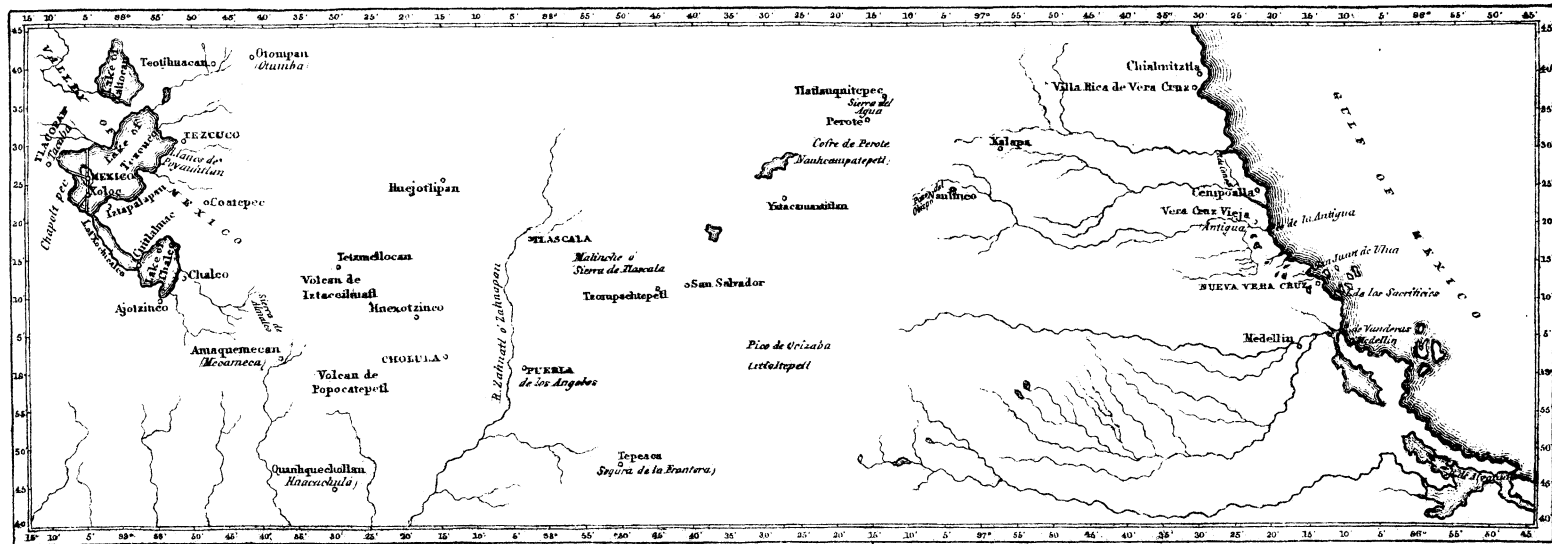


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MAP OF THE COUNTRY TRAVERSED BY THE SPANIARDS ON THEIR MARCH TO MEXICO.



CONQUEST OF MEXICO.

BOOK I.

Introduction.

PRELIMINARY VIEW OF THE AZTEC CIVILIZATION.



CHAPTER I.

ANCIENT MEXICO.—CLIMATE AND PRODUCTS.—PRIMITIVE RACES.— AZTEC EMPIRE.

OF all that extensive empire which once acknowledged the authority of Spain in the New World, no portion, for interest and importance, can be compared with Mexico;—and this equally, whether we consider the variety of its soil and climate; the inexhaustible stores of its mineral wealth; its scenery, grand and picturesque beyond example; the character of its ancient inhabitants, not only far surpassing in intelligence that of the other North American races, but reminding us, by their monuments, of the primitive civilization of Egypt and Hindostan; or, lastly, the peculiar circumstances of its Conquest, adventurous and romantic as any legend devised by Norman or Italian bard of chivalry. It is the purpose of the present narrative to exhibit the history of this Conquest, and that of the remarkable man by whom it was achieved.

But, in order that the reader may have a better understanding of the subject, it will be well, before entering on it, to take a general survey of the political and social institutions of the races who occupied the land at the time of its discovery.

The country of the ancient Mexicans, or Aztecs as they were called, formed but a very small part of the extensive territories comprehended in the modern republic of Mexico.¹ Its boundaries cannot be defined with

¹ Extensive indeed, if we may trust Archbishop Lorenzana, who tells us, "It is doubtful if the country of New Spain does not border on Tartary and Greenland;—by the way of California, on the former, and by New Mexico, on the latter"! *Historia de Nueva-España* (México, 1770), p. 38, nota.

certainty. They were much enlarged in the latter days of the empire, when they may be considered as reaching from about the eighteenth degree north, to the twenty-first, on the Atlantic; and from the fourteenth to the nineteenth, including a very narrow strip, on the Pacific.¹ In its greatest breadth, it could not exceed five degrees and a half, dwindling, as it approached its south-eastern limits, to less than two. It covered, probably, less than sixteen thousand square leagues.² Yet such is the remarkable formation of this country, that, though not more than twice as large as New England, it presented every variety of climate, and was capable of yielding nearly every fruit, found between the equator and the Arctic circle.

All along the Atlantic, the country is bordered by a broad tract, called the *tierra caliente*, or hot region, which has the usual high temperature of equinoctial lands. Parched and sandy plains are intermingled with others, of exuberant fertility, almost impervious from thickets of aromatic shrubs and wild flowers, in the midst of which tower up trees of that magnificent growth which is found only within the tropics. In this wilderness of sweets lurks the fatal *malaria*, engendered, probably, by the decomposition of rank vegetable substances in a hot and humid soil. The season of the bilious fever,—*vómito*, as it is called,—which scourges these coasts, continues from the spring to the autumnal equinox, when it is checked by the cold winds that descend from Hudson's Bay. These winds in the winter season frequently freshen into tempests, and sweeping down the Atlantic coast and the winding Gulf of Mexico, burst with the fury of a hurricane on its unprotected shores, and on the neighbouring West India islands. Such are the mighty spells with which Nature has surrounded this land of enchantment, as if to guard the golden treasures locked up within its bosom. The genius and enterprise of man have proved more potent than her spells.

After passing some twenty leagues across this burning region, the traveller finds himself rising into a purer atmosphere. His limbs recover their

¹ I have conformed to the limits fixed by Clavigero. He has, probably, examined the subject with more thoroughness and fidelity than most of his countrymen, who differ from him, and who assign a more liberal extent to the monarchy. (See his *Storia antica del Messico* (Cesena, 1780), dissert. 7.) The abbé, however, has not informed his readers on what frail foundations his conclusions rest. The extent of the Aztec empire is to be gathered from the writings of historians since the arrival of the Spaniards, and from the picture-rolls of tribute paid by the conquered cities; both sources extremely vague and defective. See the MSS. of the Mendoza Collection, in Lord Kingsborough's magnificent publication (*Antiquities of Mexico*, comprising Facsimiles of Ancient Paintings and Hieroglyphics, together with the Monuments of New Spain. London, 1830.) The difficulty of the inquiry is much increased by the fact of the conquests having been made, as will be seen hereafter, by the united arms of three powers, so that it is not always easy to tell to which party they eventually belonged. The affair is involved in so much uncertainty that Clavigero, notwithstanding

the positive assertions in his text, has not ventured, in his map, to define the precise limits of the empire, either towards the north, where it mingles with the Tezucan empire, or towards the south, where, indeed, he has fallen into the egregious blunder of asserting that, while the Mexican territory reached to the fourteenth degree, it did not include any portion of Guatemala. (See tom. i. p. 29, and tom. iv. dissert. 7.) The Tezucan chronicler Ixtlixochitl puts in a sturdy claim for the paramount empire of his own nation. *Historia Chichimeca*, MS., cap. 39, 53, et alibi.

² Eighteen to twenty thousand, according to Humboldt, who considers the Mexican territory to have been the same with that occupied by the modern intendancies of Mexico, Puebla, Vera Cruz, Oaxaca, and Valladolid. (*Essai politique sur le Royaume de Nouvelle-Espagne* (Paris, 1825), tom. i. p. 196.) This last, however, was all, or nearly all, included in the rival kingdom of Michoacán, as he himself more correctly states in another part of his work. *Comp. tom. ii. p. 164.*

elasticity. He breathes more freely, for his senses are not now oppressed by the sultry heats and intoxicating perfumes of the valley. The aspect of nature, too, has changed, and his eye no longer revels among the gay variety of colours with which the landscape was painted there. The vanilla, the indigo, and the flowering cacao-groves disappear as he advances. The sugar-cane and the glossy-leaved banana still accompany him; and, when he has ascended about four thousand feet, he sees in the unchanging verdure, and the rich foliage of the liquid-amber tree, that he has reached the height where clouds and mists settle, in their passage from the Mexican Gulf. This is the region of perpetual humidity; but he welcomes it with pleasure, as announcing his escape from the influence of the deadly *vómito*.¹ He has entered the *tierra templada*, or temperate region, whose character resembles that of the temperate zone of the globe. The features of the scenery become grand, and even terrible. His road sweeps along the base of mighty mountains, once gleaming with volcanic fires, and still resplendent in their mantles of snow, which serve as beacons to the mariner, for many a league at sea. All around he beholds traces of their ancient combustion, as his road passes along vast tracts of lava, bristling in the innumerable fantastic forms into which the fiery torrent has been thrown by the obstacles in its career. Perhaps, at the same moment, as he casts his eye down some steep slope, or almost unfathomable ravine, on the margin of the road, he sees their depths glowing with the rich blooms and enamelled vegetation of the tropics. Such are the singular contrasts presented, at the same time, to the senses, in this picturesque region!

Still pressing upwards, the traveller mounts into other climates, favourable to other kinds of cultivation. The yellow maize, or Indian corn, as we usually call it, has continued to follow him up from the lowest level; but he now first sees fields of wheat, and the other European grains brought into the country by the Conquerors. Mingled with them, he views the plantations of the aloe or maguey (*Agave Americana*), applied to such various and important uses by the Aztecs. The oaks now acquire a sturdier growth, and the dark forests of pine announce that he has entered the *tierra fria*, or cold region,—the third and last of the great natural terraces into which the country is divided. When he has climbed to the height of between seven and eight thousand feet, the weary traveller sets his foot on the summit of the Cordillera of the Andes,—the colossal range that, after traversing South America and the Isthmus of Darien, spreads out, as it enters Mexico, into that vast sheet of table-land which maintains an elevation of more than six thousand feet, for the distance of nearly two hundred leagues, until it gradually declines in the higher latitudes of the north.²

¹ The traveller who enters the country across the dreary sand-hills of Vera Cruz will hardly recognize the truth of the above description. He must look for it in other parts of the *tierra caliente*. Of recent tourists, no one has given a more gorgeous picture of the impressions made on his senses by these sunny regions than Latrobe, who came on shore at

Tampico (Rambler in Mexico (New York, 1836), chap. 1),—a traveller, it may be added, whose descriptions of man and nature in our own country, where we can judge, are distinguished by a sobriety and fairness that entitle him to confidence in his delineation of other countries.

² This long extent of country varies in elevation

Across this mountain rampart a chain of volcanic hills stretches, in a westerly direction, of still more stupendous dimensions, forming, indeed, some of the highest land on the globe. Their peaks, entering the limits of perpetual snow, diffuse a grateful coolness over the elevated plateaus below; for these last, though termed "cold," enjoy a climate the mean temperature of which is not lower than that of the central parts of Italy.¹ The air is exceedingly dry; the soil, though naturally good, is rarely clothed with the luxuriant vegetation of the lower regions. It frequently, indeed, has a parched and barren aspect, owing partly to the greater evaporation which takes place on these lofty plains, through the diminished pressure of the atmosphere, and partly, no doubt, to the want of trees to shelter the soil from the fierce influence of the summer sun. In the time of the Aztecs, the table-land was thickly covered with larch, oak, cypress, and other forest trees, the extraordinary dimensions of some of which, remaining to the present day, show that the curse of barrenness in later times is chargeable more on man than on nature. Indeed, the early Spaniards made as indiscriminate war on the forest as did our Puritan ancestors, though with much less reason. After once conquering the country, they had no lurking ambush to fear from the submissive, semi-civilized Indian, and were not, like our forefathers, obliged to keep watch and ward for a century. This spoliation of the ground, however, is said to have been pleasing to their imaginations, as it reminded them of the plains of their own Castile,—the table-land of Europe;² where the nakedness of the landscape forms the burden of every traveller's lament who visits that country.

Midway across the continent, somewhat nearer the Pacific than the Atlantic Ocean, at an elevation of nearly seven thousand five hundred feet, is the celebrated Valley of Mexico. It is of an oval form, about sixty-seven leagues in circumference,³ and is encompassed by a towering rampart of porphyritic rock, which nature seems to have provided, though ineffectually, to protect it from invasion.

The soil, once carpeted with a beautiful verdure and thickly sprinkled with stately trees, is often bare, and, in many places, white with the incrustation of salts caused by the draining of the waters. Five lakes are spread

from 5570 to 8856 feet,—equal to the height of the passes of Mount Cenis or the Great St. Bernard. The table-land stretches still three hundred leagues farther, before it declines to a level of 2624 feet. Humboldt, *Essai politique*, tom. i. pp. 157, 255.

¹ About 62° Fahrenheit, or 17° Réaumur. (Humboldt, *Essai politique*, tom. i. p. 273.) The more elevated plateaus of the table-land, as the Valley of Toluca, about 8500 feet above the sea, have a stern climate, in which the thermometer, during a great part of the day, rarely rises beyond 45° F. *Idem* (loc. cit.), and Malte-Brun (*Universal Geography*, English translation, book 83), who is, indeed, in this part of his work, but an echo of the former writer.

² The elevation of the Castiles, according to the authority repeatedly cited, is about 350 toises, or

2100 feet above the ocean. (Humboldt's *Dissertation*, apud Laborde, *Itinéraire descriptif de l'Espagne* (Paris, 1827), tom. i. p. 5.) It is rare to find plains in Europe of so great a height.

³ Archbishop Lorenzana estimates the circuit of the Valley at ninety leagues, correcting at the same time the statement of Cortés, which puts it at seventy, very near the truth, as appears from the result of M. de Humboldt's measurement, cited in the text. Its length is about eighteen leagues, by twelve and a half in breadth. (Humboldt, *Essai politique*, tom. ii. p. 29.—Lorenzana, *Hist. de Nueva-España*, p. 101.) Humboldt's map of the Valley of Mexico forms the third in his "*Atlas géographique et physique*," and, like all the others in the collection, will be found of inestimable value to the traveller, the geologist, and the historian.

over the Valley, occupying one-tenth of its surface.¹ On the opposite borders of the largest of these basins, much shrunk in its dimensions² since the days of the Aztecs, stood the cities of Mexico and Tezcuco, the capitals of the two most potent and flourishing states of Anahuac, whose history, with that of the mysterious races that preceded them in the country,³ exhibits some of the nearest approaches to civilization to be met with anciently on the North American continent.

Of these races the most conspicuous were the Toltecs. Advancing from a northerly direction, but from what region is uncertain,⁴ they entered the

¹ Humboldt, *Essai politique*, tom. ii. pp. 29, 44-49. — Malte-Brun, book 85. This latter geographer assigns only 6700 feet for the level of the Valley, contradicting himself (comp. book 83), or rather Humboldt, to whose pages he helps himself *plenis manibus*, somewhat too liberally, indeed, for the scanty references at the bottom of his page.

² Torquemada accounts in part for this diminution by supposing that, as God permitted the waters, which once covered the whole earth, to subside after mankind had been nearly exterminated for their iniquities, so he allowed the waters of the Mexican lake to subside, in token of goodwill and reconciliation, after the idolatrous races of the land had been destroyed by the Spaniards! (Monat. Via Indiana (Madrid, 1723), tom. i. p. 309.) Quite as probable, if not as orthodox, an explanation, may be found in the active evaporation of these upper regions, and in the fact of an immense drain having been constructed, during the lifetime of the good father, to reduce the waters of the principal lake and protect the capital from inundation.

³ [It is perhaps to be regretted that, instead of a meagre notice of the Toltecs with a passing allusion to earlier races, the author did not give a separate chapter to the history of the country during the ages preceding the Conquest. That history, it is true, resting on tradition or on questionable records mingled with legendary and mythological relations, is full of obscurity and doubt. But, whatever its uncertainty in regard to details, it presents a mass of general facts supported by analogy and by the stronger evidence of language and of the existing relics of the past. The number and diversity of the architectural and other remains found on the soil of Mexico and the adjacent regions, and the immense variety of the spoken languages, with the vestiges of others that have passed out of use,—all perhaps derived originally from a common stock, but exhibiting different stages of development or decay, and capable of being classified into several distinct families,—point to conclusions that render the subject one of the most attractive fields for critical investigation. These concurrent testimonies leave no doubt that, like portions of the Old World similarly favoured in regard to climate, soil, and situation, the central regions of America were occupied from a very remote period by nations which made distinct advances in civilization, and passed through a cycle of revolutions comparable to that of which the Valley of the Euphrates and other parts of Asia were anciently the scene. The useful arts were known and practised, wealth was accumulated, social systems exhibiting a certain refinement and a peculiar complexity were organized, states were established which flourished, decayed,—either from the effects of isolation or an inherent incapacity for continuance,—and were finally overthrown by invaders, by whom the experiment was repeated, though not always with equal success. Some of these nations passed away, leaving no trace but their names; others, whose very names are unknown, left mysterious monuments imbedded in the soil or records that are undecipherable. Of those that still remain, comprising about a dozen distinct

races speaking a hundred and twenty different dialects, we have the traditions preserved either in their own records or in those of the Spanish discoverers. The task of constructing out of these materials a history shorn of the adornments of mythology and fable has been attempted by the Abbé Brasseur de Bourbourg (*Histoire des Nations civilisées du Mexique et de l'Amérique-Centrale*, durant les Siècles antérieurs à Christophe Colomb, 4 vols., Paris, 1857-59), and, whatever may be thought of the method he has pursued, his research is unquestionable, and his views—very different from those which he has since put forth—merit attention. A more practical effort has been made by Don Manuel Orozco y Berra to trace the order, diffusion, and relations of the various races by the differences, the intermixtures, and the geographical limits of their languages. (*Geografía de las Lenguas y Carta etnográfica de México*, precedida de un *Ensayo de Clasificación de las mismas Lenguas y de Apuntes para las Inmigraciones de las Tribus*, México, 1864.)—Ed.]

⁴ [The uncertainty is not diminished by our being told that Tollan, Tullan, Tulan, or Tula (called also Tlapallan and Huehuetlapallan) was the original seat of this people, since we are still left in doubt whether the country so designated—like Aztlan, the supposed point of departure of the Aztecs—is to be located in New Mexico, California, the north-western extremity of America, or in Asia. M. Brasseur de Bourbourg (whose later speculations, in which the name plays a conspicuous part, will be noticed more appropriately in the Appendix) found in the Quiché manuscripts mention of four Tollans, one of them “in the east, on the other side of the sea.” “But,” he adds, “in what part of the world is it to be placed? *C'est là encore une question bien difficile à résoudre.*” (*Hist. des Nations civilisées du Mexique*, tom. i. pp. 167, 168.) Nor will the etymology much help us. According to Buschmann, *Tollan* is derived from *tolin*, reed, and signifies “place of reeds.”—“Ort der Binsen, Platz mit Binsen gewachsen, *juncetum*.” (Ueber die aztekischen Ortsnamen, S. 682.) He refers, however, to a different derivation, suggested by a writer who has made it the basis of one of those extraordinary theories which are propounded from time to time, to account for the first diffusion of the human race, and more particularly for the original settlement of America. According to this theory, the cradle of mankind was the Himalayan Mountains. “But the collective name of these lofty regions was very anciently designated by appellations the roots of which were *Tal, Tol, Tuh*, meaning tall, high, . . . as it does yet in many languages, the English, Chinese, and Arabic for instance. Such were *Tolo, Thala, Talaha, Tulan*, etc., in the old Sanscrit and primitive languages of Asia. Whence came the Asiatic *Atlas* and also the *Atlantes* of the Greeks, who, spreading through the world westerly, gave these names to many other places and nations. . . . The Talas or Atlantes occupied or conquered Europe and Africa, nay, went to America in very early times. . . . In Greece they became *Atalantes, Talautians* of Epirus, *Aetolians*. . . . They gave

territory of Anahuac,¹ probably before the close of the seventh century. Of course, little can be gleaned with certainty respecting a people whose written records have perished, and who are known to us only through the traditionary legends of the nations that succeeded them.² By the general agreement of these, however, the Toltecs were well instructed in agriculture and many of the most useful mechanic arts; were nice workers of metals; invented the complex arrangement of time adopted by the Aztecs; and, in short, were the true fountains of the civilization which distinguished this part of the continent in later times.³ They established their capital at Tula, north of the Mexican Valley, and the remains of extensive buildings were to be discerned there at the time of the Conquest.⁴ The noble ruins of religious and other edifices, still to be seen in various parts of New Spain, are referred to this people, whose name, *Toltec*, has passed into a synonym for *architect*.⁵ Their shadowy history reminds us of those primitive races who preceded the ancient Egyptians in the march of civilization; fragments of whose monuments, as they are seen at this day, incorporated with

name to Italy, *Aitala* meaning land eminent, . . . to the Atlantic Ocean, and to the great Atlantis, or America, called in the Hindu books, *Aitala* or *Tala-tola*, the fourth world, where dwelt giants or powerful men. . . . America is also filled with their names and deeds from Mexico and Carolina to Peru: the *Tol-tecas*, people of Tol, and Aztlan, *Otolum* near Palenque, many towns of *Tula* and *Tolu*; the *Talas* of Michuacan, the *Matalans*, *Aitalans*, *Tuluksis*, etc., of North America." (C. S. Rafinesque, *Atlantic Journal*, Philadelphia, 1832-33.) It need hardly be added that Tula has also been identified with the equally unknown and long-sought-for *ultima Thule*, with the simplifying effect of bringing two streams of inquiry into one channel. Meanwhile, by a different kind of criticism, the whole question is dissipated into thin air, *Tollan* and *Aztlan* being resolved into names of mere mythical import, and the regions thus designated transferred from the earth to the bright domain of the sky, from which the descriptions in the legends appear to have been borrowed. See Brinton, *Myths of the New World*, pp. 88, 89.—Ed.]

¹ Anahuac, according to Humboldt, comprehended only the country between the fourteenth and twenty-first degrees of north latitude. (*Essai politique*, tom. i. p. 197.) According to Clavigero, it included nearly all since known as New Spain. (Stor. del Messico, tom. i. p. 27.) Veytia uses it, also, as synonymous with New Spain. (*Historia antigua de Méjico* (Méjico, 1836), tom. i. cap. 12.) The first of these writers probably allows too little, as the latter do too much, for its boundaries. Ixtlixochitl says it extended four hundred leagues south of the Otomi country. (*Hist. Chichimeca*, MS., cap.

73.) The word Anahuac signifies *near the water*. It was, probably, first applied to the country around the lakes in the Mexican Valley, and gradually extended to the remoter regions occupied by the Aztecs and the other semi-civilized races. Or possibly the name may have been intended, as Veytia suggests (*Hist. antig.*, lib. 1, cap. 1), to denote the land between the waters of the Atlantic and Pacific.*

² Clavigero talks of Boturini's having written "on the faith of the Toltec historians." (Stor. del Messico, tom. i. p. 128.) But that scholar does not pretend to have ever met with a Toltec manuscript himself, and had heard of only one in the possession of Ixtlixochitl. (See his *Idea de una nueva Historia general de la América Septentrional* (Madrid, 1746), p. 110.) The latter writer tells us that his account of the Toltec and Chichimec races was "derived from interpretation" (probably of the Tezcucan paintings), "and from the traditions of old men; poor authority for events which had passed centuries before. Indeed, he acknowledges that their narratives were so full of absurdity and falsehood that he was obliged to reject nine-tenths of them. (See his *Relaciones*, MS., no. 5.) The cause of truth would not have suffered much, probably, if he had rejected nine-tenths of the remainder."

³ Ixtlixochitl, *Hist. Chich.*, MS., cap. 2.—Idem, *Relaciones*, MS., no. 2.—Sahagun, *Historia general de las Cosas de Nueva-España* (Méjico, 1829), lib. 10, cap. 29.—Veytia, *Hist. antig.*, lib. 1, cap. 27.

⁴ Sahagun, *Hist. de Nueva-España*, lib. 10, cap.

²⁹, Sahagun, *ubi supra*.—Torquemada, *Monarch. Ind.*, lib. 1, cap. 14.

* [This suggestion of Veytia is unworthy of attention,—refuted by the actual application and appropriateness of the name, and by the state of geographical knowledge and ideas at the period when it must have originated. A modern traveller, describing the appearance of the great plains as seen from the summit of Popocatepetl, remarks, "Even now that the lakes have shrunk to a fraction of their former size, we could see the fitness of the name given in old times to the Valley of Mexico, *Anahuac*, that is, By the water-side." Tylor, *Anahuac: or Mexico and the Mexicans, Ancient and Modern* (London, 1861), p. 270.—Ed.]

† [Ixtlixochitl's language does not necessarily imply that he considered any of the relations he had received as false or absurd, nor does he say that he had rejected nine-tenths of them. What he has written is, he asserts, "The true history of the Toltecs," though it does not amount to nine-tenths of the whole ("de lo que ello fué"), i.e., of what had been contained in the original records; these records having perished, and he himself having abridged the accounts he had been able to obtain of their contents, as well for the sake of brevity as because of the marvellous character of the relations ("son tan estrañas las cosas y tan peregrinas y nunca oídas"). The sources of his information are also incorrectly described; but a further mention of them will be found in a note at the end of this Book.—Ed.]

the buildings of the Egyptians themselves, give to these latter the appearance of almost modern constructions.¹

After a period of four centuries, the Toltecs, who had extended their sway over the remotest borders of Anahuac,² having been greatly reduced, it is said, by famine, pestilence, and unsuccessful wars, disappeared from the land as silently and mysteriously as they had entered it. A few of them still lingered behind, but much the greater number, probably, spread over the region of Central America and the neighbouring isles; and the traveller now speculates on the majestic ruins of Mitla and Palenque, as possibly the work of this extraordinary people.³

After the lapse of another hundred years, a numerous and rude tribe, called the Chichimecs, entered the deserted country from the regions of the far North-west. They were speedily followed by other races, of higher civilization, perhaps of the same family with the Toltecs, whose language they appear to have spoken. The most noted of these were the Aztecs or Mexicans, and the Acolhuans. The latter, better known in later times by the name of Tezcucans, from their capital, Tezcuco,⁴ on the eastern border of the Mexican lake, were peculiarly fitted, by their comparatively mild religion and manners, for receiving the tincture of civilization which could be derived from the few Toltecs that still remained in the country.⁵ This,

¹ Description de l'Égypte (Paris, 1809), Antiquités, tom. i. cap. 1. Veytia has traced the migrations of the Toltecs with sufficient industry, scarcely rewarded by the necessarily doubtful credit of the results. Hist. antig., lib. 2, cap. 21-33.

² Ixtlilxochitl, Hist. Chich., MS., cap. 73.

³ Veytia, Hist. antig., lib. 1, cap. 33.—Ixtlilxochitl, Hist. Chich., MS., cap. 3.—Idem, Relaciones, MS., nos. 4, 5.—Father Torquemada—perhaps misinterpreting the Tezcucan hieroglyphics—has accounted for this mysterious disappearance of the Toltecs by such *fee-faw-fum* stories of giants and demons as show his appetite for the marvellous was fully equal to that of any of his calling. See his Monarch. Ind., lib. 1, cap. 14.

[This supposition, neither adopted nor rejected in the text, was, as Mr. Tylor remarks, "quite tenable at the time that Prescott wrote," being founded on the statements of early writers and partially supported by the conclusions of Mr. Stephens, who believed that the ruined cities of Oaxaca, Chiapa, Yucatan, and Guatemala dated from a comparatively recent period, and were still flourishing at the time of the Spanish Conquest; and that their inhabitants, the ancestors, as he contends, of the degenerate race that now occupies the soil, were of the same stock and spoke the same language as the Mexicans. (Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan.) But these opinions have been refuted by later investigators. Orozco y Berra, in an elaborate and satisfactory examination of the question, discusses all the evidence relating to it, compares the remains in the southern provinces with those of the Valley of Mexico, points out the essential differences in the architecture, sculpture, and inscriptions, and arrives at the conclusion that there was "no point of contact or resemblance" between the two civilizations. He considers that of the southern provinces, though of a far higher grade, as long anterior in time to the Toltec domination,—the work of a

people which had passed away, under the assaults of barbarism, at a period prior to all traditions, leaving no name and no trace of their existence save those monuments which, neglected and forgotten by their successors, have become the riddle of later generations. Geografía de las Lenguas de México, pp. 122-131. See also Tylor, Anahuac, p. 189, et seq.—Ed.]

⁴ Tezcuco signifies "place of detention;" as several of the tribes who successively occupied Anahuac were said to have halted some time at the spot. Ixtlilxochitl, Hist. Chich., MS., cap. 10.*

⁵ [It is difficult to reconcile the two statements that the Toltecs "were the true fountains of the civilization which distinguished this part of the continent in later times," and that they "disappeared from the land as silently and mysteriously as they had entered it," leaving an interval of more than a century before the appearance of the Aztecs and the Acolhuans. If the latter received from the former the knowledge of those arts in which they speedily rivalled them, it must have been by more direct communication and transmission than can be inferred from the mention of a small fraction of the Toltec population as remaining in the country,—a fact which has itself the appearance of having been invented to meet the difficulty. Orozco y Berra compares this transitional period with that which followed the overthrow of the Roman Empire; but if in the former case there was, in his own words, "no conquest, but only an occupation, no war because no one to contend with," the analogy altogether fails. Brasseur de Bourbourg reduces the interval between the departure of the Toltecs and the arrival of the Chichimecs to a few years, and supposes that a considerable number of the former inhabitants remained scattered through the Valley. If, however, it be allowable to substitute probabilities for doubtful relations, it is an easier solution to believe that no interval occurred and that no emigration took place.—Ed.]

* ["Ueber die Etymologie lässt sich nichts sicheres sagen," says Buschmann, "so zuversichtlich auch Prescott, wohl nach Ixtlilxochitl, den Namen durch *place of detention* übersetzt." Ueber die aztekischen Ortsnamen, S. 697.—Fr.]

in their turn, they communicated to the barbarous Chichimecs, a large portion of whom became amalgamated with the new settlers as one nation.¹

Availing themselves of the strength derived, not only from this increase of numbers, but from their own superior refinement, the Acolhuans gradually stretched their empire over the ruder tribes in the north; while their capital was filled with a numerous population, busily employed in many of the more useful and even elegant arts of a civilized community. In this palmy state, they were suddenly assaulted by a warlike neighbour, the Tepanecs, their own kindred, and inhabitants of the same valley as themselves. Their provinces were overrun, their armies beaten, their king assassinated, and the flourishing city of Tezcuco became the prize of the victor. From this abject condition the uncommon abilities of the young prince, Nezahualcoyotl, the rightful heir to the crown, backed by the efficient aid of his Mexican allies, at length redeemed the state, and opened to it a new career of prosperity, even more brilliant than the former.²

The Mexicans, with whom our history is principally concerned, came also, as we have seen, from the remote regions of the North,—the populous hive of nations in the New World, as it has been in the Old.³ They arrived on the borders of Anahuac towards the beginning of the thirteenth century, some time after the occupation of the land by the kindred races. For a long time they did not establish themselves in any permanent residence, but continued shifting their quarters to different parts of the Mexican Valley, enduring all the casualties and hardships of a migratory life. On one occasion they were enslaved by a more powerful tribe; but their ferocity soon made them formidable to their masters.⁴ After a series of wanderings and adventures which need not shrink from comparison with the most extravagant legends of the heroic ages of antiquity, they at length halted on the south-western borders of the principal lake, in the year

¹ The historian speaks, in one page, of the Chichimecs burrowing in caves, or, at best, in cabins of straw, and, in the next, talks gravely of their *señoras, infantas, and caballeros*! * Ibid., cap. 9, et seq.—Veytia, Hist. antig., lib. 2, cap. 1-10.—Camargo, Historia de Tlascala, MS.

² Ixtlixochitl, Hist. Chich., MS., cap. 9-20.—Veytia, Hist. antig., lib. 2, cap. 29-34.

³ [Somerecent writers have contended that Mexico must have been peopled originally by migrations from the South. Aztec names and communities, and traces of Toltec settlements long anterior to the occupation of Anahuac by the same people, are found in several parts of Central America. The most primitive traditions, as well as the remains of the earliest civilization, belong also to the same

quarter. This latter fact, however, is considered by Orozco y Berra as itself an evidence of the migrations having been from the North, the first comers having been naturally attracted southward by a warmer climate, and more fertile soil, or pushed onward in this direction by successive invasions from behind. Contradictory inferences have in like manner been drawn from the existence of Aztec remains and settlements in New Mexico and Arizona. All that can be said with confidence is that neither of the opposing theories rests on a secure and sufficient basis.—Ed.]

⁴ These were the Colhuans, not Acolhuans, with whom Humboldt, and most writers since, have confounded them.† See his *Essai politique*, tom. i. p. 414; ii. p. 37.

* [The confusion arises from the fact that the name of Chichimecs, originally that of a single tribe, and subsequently of its many offshoots, was also used, like the term *barbarians* in mediæval Italy to designate successive hordes, of whatever race, being sometimes employed as a mark of contempt, and sometimes assumed as an honourable appellation. It is found applied to the Otomies, the Toltecs, and many other races.—Ed.]

† [Humboldt, strictly speaking, has not confounded the Colhuans with the Acolhuans, but has written, in the places cited, the latter name for the former. "Letzterer Name," says Buschmann, "ist der erstere mit dem Zusatz von *atl* Wasser,—Wasser Colhuer." (Ueber die aztekischen Ortsnamen, S. 690.) Yet the two tribes, according to the same authority, were entirely distinct, one alone—though which, he is unable to determine—being of the Nahuatlac race. Orozco y Berra, however, makes them both of this stock, the Acolhuans being one of the main branches, the Colhuans merely the descendants of the Toltec remnant in Anahuac.—Ed.]

1325. They there beheld, perched on the stem of a prickly pear, which shot out from the crevice of a rock that was washed by the waves, a royal eagle of extraordinary size and beauty, with a serpent in his talons, and his broad wings opened to the rising sun. They hailed the auspicious omen, announced by an oracle as indicating the site of their future city, and laid its foundations by sinking piles into the shallows; for the low marshes were half buried under water. On these they erected their light fabrics of reeds and rushes, and sought a precarious subsistence from fishing, and from the wild fowl which frequented the waters, as well as from the cultivation of such simple vegetables as they could raise on their floating gardens. The place was called Tenochtitlan, in token of its miraculous origin, though only known to Europeans by its other name of Mexico,¹ derived from their war-god, Mexitli.² The legend of its foundation is still further commemorated by the device of the eagle and the cactus, which form the arms of the modern Mexican republic. Such were the humble beginnings of the Venice of the Western World.³

The forlorn condition of the new settlers was made still worse by domestic feuds. A part of the citizens seceded from the main body, and formed a separate community on the neighbouring marshes. Thus divided, it was long before they could aspire to the acquisition of territory on the main land. They gradually increased, however, in numbers, and strengthened themselves yet more by various improvements in their polity and military discipline, while they established a reputation for courage as well as cruelty in war which made their name terrible throughout the Valley. In the early part of the fifteenth century, nearly a hundred years from the foundation of the city, an event took place which created an entire revolution in the circumstances and, to some extent, in the character of the Aztecs. This was the subversion of the Tezucan monarchy by the Tapanecs, already noticed. When the oppressive conduct of the victors had at length aroused a spirit of resistance, its prince, Nezahualcoyotl, succeeded, after incredible perils and escapes, in mustering such a force as, with the aid of the Mexicans, placed him on a level with his enemies. In two successive battles, these were defeated with great slaughter, their chief

¹ [This is not quite correct, since the form used in the letters of Cortés and other early documents is *Temixtitlan*, which is explained as a corruption of Tenochtitlan. The letters *x* and *ch* are convertible, and have the same sound,—that of the English *sh*. Mexico is *Mexitli* with the place-designation *co, tl* final being dropped before an affix.—Ed.]

² Clavigero gives good reasons for preferring the etymology of Mexico above noticed, to various others. (See his *Stor. del Messico*, tom. i. p. 168, nota.) The name *Tenochtitlan* signifies *tunal* (a cactus) *on a stone*. *Esplicacion de la Col. de Mendoza*, apud *Antiq. of Mexico*, vol. iv.

³ "Datur hæc venia antiquitati," says Livy, "ut, miscendo humana divinis, primordia urbium augustiora faciat." *Hist.*, Præf.—See, for the above paragraph, *Col. de Mendoza*, plate 1, apud *Antiq. of Mexico*, vol. i.,—Ixtilxochitl, *Hist. Chich.*, M.S., cap. 10,—Toribio, *Historia de los Indios*, M.S., Parte 3, cap. 8,—Veytia, *Hist. antig.*, lib. 2, cap. 15.

—Clavigero, after a laborious examination, assigns the following dates to some of the prominent events noticed in the text. No two authorities agree on them; and this is not strange, considering that Clavigero—the most inquisitive of all—does not always agree with himself. (Compare his dates for the coming of the Acolhuans; tom. i. p. 147, and tom. iv., dissert. 2:—)

	A.D.
The Toltecs arrived in Anahuac . . .	648
They abandoned the country . . .	1051
The Chichimecs arrived . . .	1170
The Acolhuans arrived about . . .	1200
The Mexicans reached Tula . . .	1196
They founded Mexico . . .	1325

See his dissert. 2, sec. 12. In the last date, the one of most importance, he is confirmed by the learned Veytia, who differs from him in all the others. *Hist. antig.*, lib. 2, cap. 15.

slain, and their territory, by one of those sudden reverses which characterize the wars of petty states, passed into the hands of the conquerors. It was awarded to Mexico, in return for its important services.

Then was formed that remarkable league, which, indeed, has no parallel in history. It was agreed between the states of Mexico, Tezcuco, and the neighbouring little kingdom of Tlacopan, that they should mutually support each other in their wars, offensive and defensive, and that in the distribution of the spoil one-fifth should be assigned to Tlacopan, and the remainder be divided, in what proportions is uncertain, between the other powers. The Tezcucan writers claim an equal share for their nation with the Aztecs. But this does not seem to be warranted by the immense increase of territory subsequently appropriated by the latter. And we may account for any advantage conceded to them by the treaty, on the supposition that, however inferior they may have been originally, they were at the time of making it, in a more prosperous condition than their allies, broken and dispirited by long oppression. What is more extraordinary than the treaty itself, however, is the fidelity with which it was maintained. During a century of uninterrupted warfare that ensued, no instance occurred where the parties quarrelled over the division of the spoil, which so often makes shipwreck of similar confederacies among civilized states.¹

The allies for some time found sufficient occupation for their arms in their own valley; but they soon overleaped its rocky ramparts, and by the middle of the fifteenth century, under the first Montezuma, had spread down the sides of the table-land to the borders of the Gulf of Mexico. Tenochtitlan, the Aztec capital, gave evidence of the public prosperity. Its frail tenements were supplanted by solid structures of stone and lime. Its population rapidly increased. Its old feuds were healed. The citizens who had seceded were again brought under a common government with the main body, and the quarter they occupied was permanently connected with the parent city; the dimensions of which, covering the same ground, were much larger than those of the modern capital of Mexico.²

Fortunately, the throne was filled by a succession of able princes, who knew how to profit by their enlarged resources and by the martial enthusiasm of the nation. Year after year saw them return, loaded with the spoils of conquered cities, and with throngs of devoted captives, to their capital. No state was able long to resist the accumulated strength of

¹ The loyal Tezcucan chronicler claims the supreme dignity for his own sovereign, if not the greatest share of the spoil, by this imperial compact. (Hist. Chich., cap. 32.) Torquemada, on the other hand, claims one-half of all the conquered lands for Mexico. (Monarch. Ind., lib. 2, cap. 40.) All agree in assigning only one-fifth to Tlacopan; and Veytia (Hist. antig., lib. 3, cap. 3) and Zurita (Rapport sur les différentes Classes de Chefs de la Nouvelle-Espagne, trad. de Ternaux (Paris, 1840), p. 11), both very competent critics, acquiesce in an equal division between the two principal states in the confederacy. An ode, still extant, of Nezahualcoyotl, in its Castilian version, bears testimony to the singular union of the three powers :—

“ solo se acordarán en las Naciones
lo bien que gobernaron
las *tres Cabezas* que el Imperio honraron.”
Cantares del Emperador
Nezahualcoyotl, MS.

² See the plans of the ancient and modern capital, in Bullock's "Mexico," first edition. The original of the ancient map was obtained by that traveller from the collection of the unfortunate Boturini; if, as seems probable, it is the one indicated on page 13 of his Catalogue, I find no warrant for Mr. Bullock's statement that it was the one prepared for Cortés by the order of Montezuma.

the confederates. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, just before the arrival of the Spaniards, the Aztec dominion reached across the continent, from the Atlantic to the Pacific; and, under the bold and bloody Ahuitzotl, its arms had been carried far over the limits already noticed as defining its permanent territory, into the farthest corners of Guatemala and Nicaragua. This extent of empire, however limited in comparison with that of many other states, is truly wonderful, considering it as the acquisition of a people whose whole population and resources had so recently been comprised within the walls of their own petty city, and considering, moreover, that the conquered territory was thickly settled by various races, bred to arms like the Mexicans, and little inferior to them in social organization. The history of the Aztecs suggests some strong points of resemblance to that of the ancient Romans, not only in their military successes, but in the policy which led to them.¹

The most important contribution, of late years, to the early history of Mexico is the *Historia antigua* of the Lic. Don Mariano Veytia, published in the city of Mexico, in 1836. This scholar was born of an ancient and highly respectable family at Puebla, 1718. After finishing his academic education, he went to Spain, where he was kindly received at court. He afterwards visited several other countries of Europe, made himself acquainted with their languages, and returned home well stored with the fruits of a discriminating observation and diligent study. The rest of his life he devoted to letters; especially to the illustration of the national history and antiquities. As the executor of the unfortunate Boturini, with whom he had contracted an intimacy in Madrid, he obtained access to his valuable collection of manuscripts in Mexico, and from them, and every other source which his position in society and his eminent character opened to him, he composed various works, none of which, however, except the one before us, has been admitted to the honours of the press. The time of his death is not given by his editor, but it was probably not later than 1780.

Veytia's history covers the whole period from the first occupation of Anahuac to the middle of the fifteenth century, at which point his labours were unfortunately terminated by his death. In the early portion he has endeavoured to trace the migratory movements and historical annals of the principal races who entered the country. Every page bears testimony to the extent and fidelity of his researches; and, if we feel but moderate confidence in the results, the fault is not imputable to him, so much as to the dark and doubtful nature of the subject. As he descends to later ages, he is more occupied with the fortunes of the Tezucan than with those of the Aztec dynasty, which have been amply discussed by others of his countrymen. The premature close of his labours prevented him, probably, from giving that attention to the domestic institutions of the people he describes, to which they are entitled as the most important subject of inquiry to the historian. The deficiency has been supplied by his judicious editor, Orteaga, from other sources. In the early part of his work, Veytia has explained the chronological system of the Aztecs, but, like most writers preceding the accurate Gama, with indifferent success. As a critic, he certainly ranks much higher than the annalists who preceded him, and, when his own religion is not involved, shows a discriminating judgment. When

¹ Clavigero, Stor. del Messico, tom. i. lib. 2.—Torquemada, Monarch. Ind., tom. i. lib. 2.—Boturini, Idea, p. 146.—Col. of Mendoza, Part 1, and Codex Telleriano-Remensis, apud Antiq. of Mexico, vols. i., vi.—Machiavelli has noticed it as one great cause of the military successes of the Romans, "that they associated themselves, in their wars, with other

states, as the principal," and expresses his astonishment that a similar policy should not have been adopted by ambitious republics in later times. (See his Discorsi sopra T. Livio, lib. 2, cap. 4, apud Opere (Geneva, 1798).) This, as we have seen above, was the very course pursued by the Mexicans.

it is, he betrays a full measure of the credulity which still maintains its hold on too many even of the well-informed of his countrymen. The editor of the work has given a very interesting letter from the Abbé Clavigero to Veytia, written when the former was a poor and humble exile, and in the tone of one addressing a person of high standing and literary eminence. Both were employed on the same subject. The writings of the poor abbé, published again and again, and translated into various languages, have spread his fame throughout Europe; while the name of Veytia, whose works have been locked up in their primitive manuscript, is scarcely known beyond the boundaries of Mexico.

CHAPTER II.

SUCCESSION TO THE CROWN.—AZTEC NOBILITY.—JUDICIAL SYSTEM.—LAWS
AND REVENUES.—MILITARY INSTITUTIONS.

THE form of government differed in the different states of Anahuac. With the Aztecs and Tezcucans it was monarchical and nearly absolute. The two nations resembled each other so much in their political institutions that one of their historians has remarked, in too unqualified a manner indeed, that what is told of one may be always understood as applying to the other.¹ I shall direct my inquiries to the Mexican polity, borrowing an illustration occasionally from that of the rival kingdom.

The government was an elective monarchy. Four of the principal nobles, who had been chosen by their own body in the preceding reign, filled the office of electors, to whom were added, with merely an honorary rank, however, the two royal allies of Tezcucan and Tlacopan. The sovereign was selected from the brothers of the deceased prince, or, in default of them, from his nephews. Thus the election was always restricted to the same family. The candidate preferred must have distinguished himself in war, though, as in the case of the last Montezuma, he were a member of the priesthood.² This singular mode of supplying the throne had some advantages. The candidates received an education which fitted them for the royal dignity, while the age at which they were chosen not only secured the nation against the evils of minority, but afforded ample means for estimating their qualifications for the office. The result, at all events, was favourable; since the throne, as already noticed, was filled by a succession of able princes, well qualified to rule over a warlike and ambitious people. The scheme of election, however defective, argues a more refined and calculating policy than was to have been expected from a barbarous nation.³

¹ Ixtlilxochitl, Hist. Chich., MS., cap. 36.

² This was an exception.—In Egypt, also, the king was frequently taken from the warrior caste, though obliged afterwards to be instructed in the mysteries of the priesthood: ὁ δὲ ἐκ μαχίμων

ἀποδεδειγμένος εὐθὺς ἐγένετο τῶν ἱέρων.
Plutarch, de Isid. et Osir., sec. 9.

³ Torquemada, Monarch. Ind., lib. 2, cap. 18; lib. 11, cap. 27.—Clavigero, Stor. del Messico, tom. ii. p. 112.—Acosta, Natural and Morall Historie of

The new monarch was installed in his regal dignity with much parade of religious ceremony, but not until, by a victorious campaign, he had obtained a sufficient number of captives to grace his triumphal entry into the capital and to furnish victims for the dark and bloody rites which stained the Aztec superstition. Amidst this pomp of human sacrifice he was crowned. The crown, resembling a mitre in its form, and curiously ornamented with gold, gems, and feathers, was placed on his head by the lord of Tezcucó, the most powerful of his royal allies. The title of *King*, by which the earlier Aztec princes are distinguished by Spanish writers, is supplanted by that of *Emperor* in the later reigns, intimating, perhaps, his superiority over the confederated monarchies of Tlacopan and Tezcucó.¹

The Aztec princes, especially towards the close of the dynasty, lived in a barbaric pomp, truly Oriental. Their spacious palaces were provided with halls for the different councils who aided the monarch in the transaction of business. The chief of these was a sort of privy council, composed in part, probably, of the four electors chosen by the nobles after the accession, whose places, when made vacant by death, were immediately supplied as before. It was the business of this body, so far as can be gathered from the very loose accounts given of it, to advise the king, in respect to the government of the provinces, the administration of the revenues, and, indeed, on all great matters of public interest.²

In the royal buildings were accommodations, also, for a numerous body-guard of the sovereign, made up of the chief nobility. It is not easy to determine with precision, in these barbarian governments, the limits of the several orders. It is certain there was a distinct class of nobles, with large landed possessions, who held the most important offices near the person of the prince, and engrossed the administration of the provinces and cities.³ Many of these could trace their descent from the founders of the Aztec monarchy. According to some writers of authority, there were thirty great *caciques*, who had their residence, at least a part of the year, in the capital, and who could muster a hundred thousand vassals each on their estates.⁴ Without relying on such wild statements, it is clear, from the testimony of the Conquerors, that the country was occupied by numerous powerful chieftains, who lived like independent princes on their domains. If it be true that the kings encouraged, or, indeed, exacted, the residence of these

the East and West Indies, Eng. trans. (London, 1604).—According to Zurita, an election by the nobles took place only in default of heirs of the deceased monarch. (Rapport, p. 15.) The minute historical investigation of Clavigero may be permitted to outweigh this general assertion.

¹ Sahagun, Hist. de Nueva-España, lib. 6, cap. 9, 10, 14; lib. 8, cap. 31, 34.—See, also, Zurita, Rapport, pp. 20-23.—Ixtlilxochitl stoutly claims this supremacy for his own nation. (Hist. Chich., MS., cap. 34.) His assertions are at variance with facts stated by himself elsewhere, and are not countenanced by any other writer whom I have consulted.

² Sahagun, who places the elective power in a

much larger body, speaks of four senators, who formed a state council. (Hist. de Nueva-España, lib. 8, cap. 30.) Acosta enlarges the council beyond the number of the electors. (Lib. 6, ch. 26.) No two writers agree.

³ Zurita enumerates four orders of chiefs, all of whom were exempted from imposts and enjoyed very considerable privileges. He does not discriminate the several ranks with much precision. Rapport, p. 47, et seq.

⁴ See, in particular, Herrera, Historia general de los Hechos de los Castellanos en las Islas y Tierra firme del Mar Océano (Madrid, 1730), dec. 2, lib. 7, cap. 12.

nobles in the capital, and required hostages in their absence, it is evident that their power must have been very formidable.¹

Their estates appear to have been held by various tenures, and to have been subject to different restrictions. Some of them, earned by their own good swords or received as the recompense of public services, were held without any limitation, except that the possessors could not dispose of them to a plebeian.² Others were entailed on the eldest male issue, and, in default of such, reverted to the crown. Most of them seem to have been burdened with the obligation of military service. The principal chiefs of Tezcuco, according to its chronicler, were expressly obliged to support their prince with their armed vassals, to attend his court, and aid him in the council. Some, instead of these services, were to provide for the repairs of his buildings, and to keep the royal demesnes in order, with an annual offering, by way of homage, of fruits and flowers. It was usual, if we are to believe historians, for a new king, on his accession, to confirm the investiture of estates derived from the crown.³

It cannot be denied that we recognize, in all this, several features of the feudal system, which, no doubt, lose nothing of their effect under the hands of the Spanish writers, who are fond of tracing analogies to European institutions. But such analogies lead sometimes to very erroneous conclusions. The obligation of military service, for instance, the most essential principle of a fief, seems to be naturally demanded by every government from its subjects. As to minor points of resemblance, they fall far short of that harmonious system of reciprocal service and protection which embraced, in nice gradation, every order of a feudal monarchy. The kingdoms of Anahuac were in their nature despotic, attended, indeed, with many mitigating circumstances unknown to the despotisms of the East; but it is chimerical to look for much in common—beyond a few accidental forms and ceremonies—with those aristocratic institutions of the Middle Ages which made the court of every petty baron the precise image in miniature of that of his sovereign.

The legislative power, both in Mexico and Tezcuco, resided wholly with the monarch. This feature of despotism, however, was in some measure counteracted by the constitution of the judicial tribunals,—of more importance, among a rude people, than the legislative, since it is easier to make good laws for such a community than to enforce them, and the best laws, badly administered, are but a mockery. Over each of the principal

¹ Carta de Cortés, ap. Lorenzana, *Hist. de Nueva-España*, p. 110.—Torquemada, *Monarch. Ind.*, lib. 2, cap. 89; lib. 14, cap. 6.—Clavigero, *Stor. del Messico*, tom. ii, p. 121.—Zurita, *Rapport*, pp. 48, 65.—Ixtililxochitl (*Hist. Chich.*, MS., cap. 34) speaks of thirty great feudal chiefs, some of them Tezcucan and Tlacopan, whom he styles "grandeeds of the empire"! He says nothing of the great *tail* of 100,000 vassals to each, mentioned by Torquemada and Herrera.

² *Macehuatl*,—a word equivalent to the French word *roturier*. Nor could fiefs originally be held by plebeians in France. See Hallam's *Middle Ages* (London, 1819), vol. ii. p. 207.

³ Ixtililxochitl, *Hist. Chich.*, MS., ubi supra.—Zurita, *Rapport*, ubi supra.—Clavigero, *Stor. del Messico*, tom. ii, pp. 122-124.—Torquemada, *Monarch. Ind.*, lib. 14, cap. 7.—Gomara, *Crónica de Nueva-España*, cap. 199, ap. Barcia, tom. ii.—Boturini (*Idea*, p. 165) carries back the origin of *fiefs* in Anahuac to the twelfth century. Carli says, "Le système politique y étoit féodal." In the next page he tells us, "Personal merit alone made the distinction of the nobility"! (*Lettres Américaines*, trad. Fr. (Paris, 1788), tom. i. let. 11.) Carli was a writer of a lively imagination.

cities, with its dependent territories, was placed a supreme judge, appointed by the crown, with original and final jurisdiction in both civil and criminal cases. There was no appeal from his sentence to any other tribunal, nor even to the king. He held his office during life; and any one who usurped his ensigns was punished with death.¹

Below this magistrate was a court, established in each province, and consisting of three members. It held concurrent jurisdiction with the supreme judge in civil suits, but in criminal an appeal lay to his tribunal. Besides these courts, there was a body of inferior magistrates, distributed through the country, chosen by the people themselves in their several districts. Their authority was limited to smaller causes, while the more important were carried up to the higher courts. There was still another class of subordinate officers, appointed also by the people, each of whom was to watch over the conduct of a certain number of families and report any disorder or breach of the laws to the higher authorities.²

In Tezcuco the judicial arrangements were of a more refined character;³ and a gradation of tribunals finally terminated in a general meeting or parliament, consisting of all the judges, great and petty, throughout the kingdom, held every eighty days in the capital, over which the king presided in person. This body determined all suits which, from their importance or difficulty, had been reserved for its consideration by the lower tribunals. It served, moreover, as a council of state, to assist the monarch in the transaction of public business.⁴

Such are the vague and imperfect notices that can be gleaned, respecting the Aztec tribunals, from the hieroglyphical paintings still preserved, and from the most accredited Spanish writers. These, being usually ecclesiastics, have taken much less interest in this subject than in matters connected with religion. They find some apology, certainly, in the early destruction of most of the Indian paintings, from which their information was, in part, to be gathered.

On the whole, however, it must be inferred that the Aztecs were suffi-

¹ This magistrate, who was called *cihuacoatl*,* was also to audit the accounts of the collectors of the taxes in his district. (Clavigero, Stor. del Messico, tom. ii. p. 127.—Torquemada, Monarch. Ind., lib. 11, cap. 25.) The Mendoza Collection contains a painting of the courts of justice under Montezuma, who introduced great changes in them. (Antiq. of Mexico, vol. i., Plate 70.) According to the interpreter, an appeal lay from them, in certain cases, to the king's council. Ibid., vol. vi. p. 79.

² Clavigero, Stor. del Messico, tom. ii. pp. 127, 128.—Torquemada, Monarch. Ind., ubi supra.—In this arrangement of the more humble magistrates we are reminded of the Anglo-Saxon hundreds and tithings, especially the latter, the members of which were to watch over the conduct of the families in their districts and bring the offenders to justice. The hard penalty of mutual responsibility was not known to the Mexicans.

³ Zurita, so temperate, usually, in his language, remarks that, in the capital, "Tribunals were instituted which might compare in their organization with the royal audiences of Castile." (Rapport, p. 93.) His observations are chiefly drawn from the Tezcuacan courts, which in their forms of procedure, he says, were like the Aztec. (Loc. cit.)

⁴ Boturini, Idea, p. 87.—Torquemada, Monarch. Ind., lib. 11, cap. 26.—Zurita compares this body to the Castilian *córtes*. It would seem, however, according to him, to have consisted only of twelve principal judges, besides the king. His meaning is somewhat doubtful. (Rapport, pp. 94, 101, 106.) M. de Humboldt, in his account of the Aztec courts, has confounded them with the Tezcuacan. Comp. Vues des Cordillères et Monumens des Peuples indigènes de l'Amérique (Paris, 1810), p. 55, and Clavigero, Stor. del Messico, tom. ii. pp. 128, 129.

* [This word, a compound of *cihuatl*, woman, and *coatl*, serpent, was the name of a divinity, the mythical mother of the human species. Its typical application may have had reference to justice, or law, as the source of social order.—En.]

ciently civilized to evince a solicitude for the rights both of property and of persons. The law, authorizing an appeal to the highest judicature in criminal matters only, shows an attention to personal security, rendered the more obligatory by the extreme severity of their penal code, which would naturally have made them more cautious of a wrong conviction. The existence of a number of co-ordinate tribunals, without a central one of supreme authority to control the whole, must have given rise to very discordant interpretations of the law in different districts. But this is an evil which they shared in common with most of the nations of Europe.

The provision for making the superior judges wholly independent of the crown was worthy of an enlightened people. It presented the strongest barrier that a mere constitution could afford against tyranny. It is not, indeed, to be supposed that, in a government otherwise so despotic, means could not be found for influencing the magistrate. But it was a great step to fence round his authority with the sanction of the law; and no one of the Aztec monarchs, so far as I know, is accused of an attempt to violate it.

To receive presents or a bribe, to be guilty of collusion in any way with a suitor, was punished, in a judge, with death. Who, or what tribunal, decided as to his guilt, does not appear. In Tezcuco this was done by the rest of the court. But the king presided over that body. The Tezcucan prince Nezahualpilli, who rarely tempered justice with mercy, put one judge to death for taking a bribe, and another for determining suits in his own house,—a capital offence, also, by law.¹

The judges of the higher tribunals were maintained from the produce of a part of the crown lands, reserved for this purpose. They, as well as the supreme judge, held their offices for life. The proceedings in the courts were conducted with decency and order. The judges wore an appropriate dress, and attended to business both parts of the day, dining always, for the sake of despatch, in an apartment of the same building where they held their session; a method of proceeding much commended by the Spanish chroniclers, to whom despatch was not very familiar in their own tribunals. Officers attended to preserve order, and others summoned the parties and produced them in court. No counsel was employed; the parties stated their own case and supported it by their witnesses. The oath of the accused was also admitted in evidence. The statement of the case, the testimony, and the proceedings of the trial were all set forth by a clerk, in hieroglyphical paintings, and handed over to the court. The paintings were executed with so much accuracy that in all suits respecting real property they were allowed to be produced as good authority in the Spanish tribunals, very long after the Conquest; and a chair for their study and interpretation was established at Mexico in 1553, which has

¹ "If this should be done now, what an excellent thing it would be!" exclaims Sahagun's Mexican editor. *Hist. de Nueva-España*, tom. ii. p. 304.

nota.—Zurita, *Rapport*, p. 102.—Torquemada, *Monarch. Ind.*, ubi supra.—Ixtililxochitl, *Hist. Chich.*, MS., cap. 67.

long since shared the fate of most other provisions for learning in that unfortunate country.¹

A capital sentence was indicated by a line traced with an arrow across the portrait of the accused. In Tezcuco, where the king presided in the court, this, according to the national chronicler, was done with extraordinary parade. His description, which is of rather a poetical cast, I give in his own words. "In the royal palace of Tezcuco was a courtyard, on the opposite sides of which were two halls of justice. In the principal one, called the 'tribunal of God,' was a throne of pure gold, inlaid with turquoises and other precious stones. On a stool in front was placed a human skull, crowned with an immense emerald of a pyramidal form, and surmounted by an aigrette of brilliant plumes and precious stones. The skull was laid on a heap of military weapons, shields, quivers, bows, and arrows. The walls were hung with tapestry, made of the hair of different wild animals, of rich and various colours, festooned by gold rings and embroidered with figures of birds and flowers. Above the throne was a canopy of variegated plumage, from the centre of which shot forth resplendent rays of gold and jewels. The other tribunal, called 'the King's,' was also surmounted by a gorgeous canopy of feathers, on which were emblazoned the royal arms. Here the sovereign gave public audience and communicated his despatches. But when he decided important causes, or confirmed a capital sentence, he passed to the 'tribunal of God,' attended by the fourteen great lords of the realm, marshalled according to their rank. Then, putting on his mitred crown, incrustated with precious stones, and holding a golden arrow, by way of sceptre, in his left hand, he laid his right upon the skull, and pronounced judgment."² All this looks rather fine for a court of justice, it must be owned. But it is certain that the Tezucucans, as we shall see hereafter, possessed both the materials and the skill requisite to work them up in this manner. Had they been a little further advanced in refinement, one might well doubt their having the bad taste to do so.

The laws of the Aztecs were registered and exhibited to the people, in their hieroglyphical paintings. Much the larger part of them, as in every nation imperfectly civilized, relates rather to the security of persons than of property. The great crimes against society were all made capital. Even the murder of a slave was punished with death. Adulterers, as among the Jews, were stoned to death. Thieving, according to the degree of the offence, was punished by slavery or death. Yet the Mexicans could have been under no great apprehension of this crime, since the entrances to their dwellings were not secured by bolts or fastenings of any kind. It was a capital offence to remove the boundaries of another's lands; to alter the

¹ Zurita, *Rapport*, pp. 95, 100, 103.—Sahagun, *Hist. de Nueva-España*, loc. cit.—Humboldt, *Vues des Cordillères*, pp. 55, 56.—Torquemada, *Monarch. Ind.*, lib. 11, cap. 25.—Clavigero says the accused might free himself by oath: "il reo poteva purgarsi

col giuramento." (*Stor. del Messico*, tom. ii. p. 129.) What rogue, then, could ever have been convicted?

² Ixtlilxochitl, *Hist. Chich.*, MS., cap. 36.—These various objects had a symbolical meaning, according to Boturini, *Idea*, p. 84.

established measures ; and for a guardian not to be able to give a good account of his ward's property. These regulations evince a regard for equity in dealings, and for private rights, which argues a considerable progress in civilization. Prodigals, who squandered their patrimony, were punished in like manner ; a severe sentence, since the crime brought its adequate punishment along with it. Intemperance, which was the burden, moreover, of their religious homilies, was visited with the severest penalties ; as if they had foreseen in it the consuming canker of their own as well as of the other Indian races in later times. It was punished in the young with death, and in older persons with loss of rank and confiscation of property. Yet a decent conviviality was not meant to be proscribed at their festivals, and they possessed the means of indulging it, in a mild fermented liquor, called *pulque*, which is still popular, not only with the Indian, but the European population of the country.¹

The rites of marriage were celebrated with as much formality as in any Christian country ; and the institution was held in such reverence that a tribunal was instituted for the sole purpose of determining questions relating to it. Divorces could not be obtained until authorized by a sentence of this court, after a patient hearing of the parties.

But the most remarkable part of the Aztec code was that relating to slavery. There were several descriptions of slaves : prisoners taken in war who were almost always reserved for the dreadful doom of sacrifice ; criminals, public debtors, persons who, from extreme poverty, voluntarily resigned their freedom, and children who were sold by their own parents. In the last instance, usually occasioned also by poverty, it was common for the parents, with the master's consent, to substitute others of their children successively, as they grew up ; thus distributing the burden as equally as possible among the different members of the family. The willingness of freemen to incur the penalties of this condition is explained by the mild form in which it existed. The contract of sale was executed in the presence of at least four witnesses. The services to be exacted were limited with great precision. The slave was allowed to have his own family, to hold property, and even other slaves. His children were free. No one could be born to slavery in Mexico ;² an honourable distinction, not known, I believe, in any civilized community where slavery has been sanctioned.³ Slaves were not sold by their masters, unless when these

¹ Paintings of the Mendoza Collection, Pl. 72, and Interpretation, ap. *Antiq. of Mexico*, vol. vi. p. 87.—Torquemada, *Monarch. Ind.*, lib. 12, cap. 7.—Clavigero, *Stor. del Messico*, tom. ii. pp. 130-134.—Camargo, *Hist. de Tlascala*, MS.—They could scarcely have been an intemperate people, with these heavy penalties hanging over them. Indeed, Zurita bears testimony that those Spaniards who thought they were greatly erred. (*Rapport*, p. 112.) M. Ternaux's translation of a passage of the Anonymous Conqueror, "aucun peuple n'est aussi sobre" (*Recueil de Pièces relatives à la Conquête du Mexique*, ap. *Voyages*, etc. (Paris, 1838), p. 54), may give a more favourable impression, however, than

that intended by his original, whose remark is confined to abstemiousness in eating. See the *Relatione*, ap. Ramusio, *Raccolta delle Navigazioni et Viaggi* (Venetia, 1554-1565).

² In ancient Egypt the child of a slave was born free, if the father were free. (Diodorus, *Bibl. Hist.*, lib. 1, sec. 80.) This, though more liberal than the code of most countries, fell short of the Mexican.

³ In Egypt the same penalty was attached to the murder of a slave as to that of a freeman. (*Ibid.*, lib. 1, sec. 77.) Robertson speaks of a class of slaves held so cheap in the eye of the Mexican law that one might kill them with impunity. (*History of America* (ed. London, 1776), vol. iii. p. 164.) This,

were driven to it by poverty. They were often liberated by them at their death, and sometimes, as there was no natural repugnance founded on difference of blood and race, were married to them. Yet a refractory or vicious slave might be led into the market, with a collar round his neck, which intimated his bad character, and there be publicly sold, and on a second sale, reserved for sacrifice.¹

Such are some of the most striking features of the Aztec code, to which the Tezcucan bore great resemblance.² With some exceptions, it is stamped with the severity, the ferocity indeed, of a rude people, hardened by familiarity with scenes of blood, and relying on physical instead of moral means for the correction of evil.³ Still, it evinces a profound respect for the great principles of morality, and as clear a perception of these principles as is to be found in the most cultivated nations.

The royal revenues were derived from various sources. The crown lands, which appear to have been extensive, made their returns in kind. The places in the neighbourhood of the capital were bound to supply workmen and materials for building the king's palaces and keeping them in repair. They were also to furnish fuel, provisions, and whatever was necessary for his ordinary domestic expenditure, which was certainly on no stinted scale.⁴ The principal cities, which had numerous villages and a large territory dependent on them, were distributed into districts, with each a share of the lands allotted to it, for its support. The inhabitants paid a stipulated part of the produce to the crown. The vassals of the great chiefs, also, paid a portion of their earnings into the public treasury; an arrangement not at all in the spirit of the feudal institutions.⁵

In addition to this tax on all the agricultural produce of the kingdom, there was another on its manufactures. The nature and the variety of the tributes will be best shown by an enumeration of some of the principal articles. These were cotton dresses, and mantles of feather-work exquisitely made; ornamented armour; vases and plates of gold; gold dust, bands and bracelets; crystal, gilt, and varnished jars and goblets; bells, arms, and utensils of copper; reams of paper; grain, fruits, copal,

however, was not in Mexico, but in Nicaragua (see his own authority, Herrera, Hist. general, dec. 3, lib. 4, cap. 2), a distant country, not incorporated in the Mexican empire, and with laws and institutions very different from those of the latter.

¹ Torquemada, Monarch. Ind., lib. 12, cap. 15; lib. 14, cap. 16, 17.—Sahagun, Hist. de Nueva-España, lib. 8, cap. 14.—Clavigero, Stor. del Messico, tom. ii. pp. 134-136.

² Ixtlilxochitl, Hist. Chich., MS., cap. 38, and Relaciones, MS.—The Tezcucan code, indeed, as digested under the great Nezahualcoyotl, formed the basis of the Mexican, in the latter days of the empire. Zurita, Rapport, p. 95.

³ In this, at least, they did not resemble the Romans; of whom their countrymen could boast, "Gloriarī licet, nulli gentium mitiores placuisse pœnas." Livy, Hist., lib. 1, cap. 28.

⁴ The Tezcucan revenues were, in like manner, paid in the produce of the country. The various branches of the royal expenditure were defrayed by specified towns and districts; and the whole arrange-

ments here, and in Mexico, bore a remarkable resemblance to the financial regulations of the Persian empire, as reported by the Greek writers (see Herodotus, Clio, sec. 192); with this difference, however, that the towns of Persia proper were not burdened with tributes, like the conquered cities. Idem, Thalia, sec. 97.

⁵ Lorenzana, Hist. de Nueva-España, p. 172.—Torquemada, Monarch. Ind., lib. 2, cap. 89; lib. 14, cap. 7.—Boturini, Idea, p. 166.—Camargo, Hist. de Tlascala, MS.—Herrera, Hist. general, dec. 2, lib. 7, cap. 13.—The people of the provinces were distributed into *calpulli*, or tribes, who held the lands of the neighbourhood in common. Officers of their own appointment parcelled out these lands among the several families of the *calpulli*; and on the extinction or removal of a family its lands reverted to the common stock, to be again distributed. The individual proprietor had no power to alienate them. The laws regulating these matters were very precise, and had existed ever since the occupation of the country by the Aztecs. Zurita, Rapport, pp. 51-52.

amber, cochineal, cacao, wild animals and birds, timber, lime, mats, &c.¹ In this curious medley of the most homely commodities and the elegant superfluities of luxury, it is singular that no mention should be made of silver, the great staple of the country in later times, and the use of which was certainly known to the Aztecs.²

Garrisons were established in the larger cities,—probably those at a distance and recently conquered,—to keep down revolt, and to enforce the payment of the tribute.³ Tax-gatherers were also distributed throughout the kingdom, who were recognized by their official badges, and dreaded from the merciless rigour of their exactions. By a stern law, every defaulter was liable to be taken and sold as a slave. In the capital were spacious granaries and warehouses for the reception of the tributes. A receiver-general was quartered in the palace, who rendered in an exact account of the various contributions, and watched over the conduct of the inferior agents, in whom the least malversation was summarily punished. This functionary was furnished with a map of the whole empire, with a minute specification of the imposts assessed on every part of it. These imposts, moderate under the reigns of the early princes, became so burdensome under those at the close of the dynasty, being rendered still more oppressive by the manner of collection, that they bred disaffection throughout the land, and prepared the way for its conquest by the Spaniards.⁴

Communication was maintained with the remotest parts of the country by means of couriers. Post-houses were established on the great roads, about two leagues distant from each other. The courier, bearing his despatches in the form of a hieroglyphical painting, ran with them to the first station, where they were taken by another messenger and carried forward to the next, and so on till they reached the capital. These couriers, trained from childhood, travelled with incredible swiftness,

¹ The following items of the tribute furnished by different cities will give a more precise idea of its nature:—20 chests of ground chocolate; 40 pieces of armour, of a particular device; 2400 loads of large mantles, of twisted cloth; 800 loads of small mantles, of rich wearing apparel; 5 pieces of armour, of rich feathers; 60 pieces of armour, of common feathers; a chest of beans; a chest of *chian*; a chest of maize; 8000 reams of paper; likewise 2000 loaves of very white salt, refined in the shape of a mould, for the consumption only of the lords of Mexico; 8000 lumps of unrefined copal; 400 small baskets of white refined copal; 100 copper axes; 80 loads of red chocolate; 800 *xicaras*, out of which they drank chocolate; a little vessel of small turquoise stones; 4 chests of timber, full of maize; 4000 loads of lime; tiles of gold, of the size of an oyster, and as thick as the finger; 40 bags of cochineal; 20 bags of gold dust, of the finest quality; a diadem of gold, of a specified pattern; 20 lip-jewels of clear amber, ornamented with gold; 200 loads of chocolate; 100 pots or jars of liquid-amber; 8000 *handfuls* of rich scarlet feathers; 40 tiger-skins; 1600 bundles of cotton, etc. etc. Col. de Mendoza, part 2, ap. Antiq. of Mexico, vols. i, vi.

² Mapa de Tributos, ap. Lorenzana, Hist. de Nueva-España.—Tribute-roll, ap. Antiq. of Mexico, vol. i., and Interpretation, vol. vi. pp. 17-44.—The Mendoza Collection, in the Bodleian Library at

Oxford, contains a roll of the cities of the Mexican empire, with the specific tributes exacted from them. It is a copy made after the Conquest, with a pen, on European paper. (See Foreign Quarterly Review, No. XVII. Art. 4.) An original painting of the same roll was in Boturini's museum. Lorenzana has given us engravings of it, in which the outlines of the Oxford copy are filled up, though somewhat rudely. Clavigero considers the explanations in Lorenzana's edition very inaccurate (Stor, del Messico, tom. i. p. 25), a judgment confirmed by Aglio, who has transcribed the entire collection of the Mendoza papers, in the first volume of the Antiquities of Mexico. It would have much facilitated reference to his plates if they had been numbered;—a strange omission!

³ The caciques, who submitted to the allied arms, were usually confirmed in their authority, and the conquered places allowed to retain their laws and usages. (Zurita, Rapport, p. 67.) The conquests were not always partitioned, but sometimes, singularly enough, were held in common by the three powers. Ibid., p. 11.

⁴ Col. de Mendoza, ap. Antiq. of Mexico, vol. vi. p. 17.—Carta de Cortés, ap. Lorenzana, Hist. de Nueva-España, p. 110.—Torquemada, Monarch. Ind., lib. 14, cap. 6, 8.—Herrera, Hist. general, dec. 2, lib. 7, cap. 13.—Sahagun, Hist. de Nueva-España, lib. 8, cap. 18, 19.

—not four or five leagues an hour, as an old chronicler would make us believe, but with such speed that despatches were carried from one to two hundred miles a day.¹ Fresh fish was frequently served at Montezuma's table in twenty-four hours from the time it had been taken in the Gulf of Mexico, two hundred miles from the capital. In this way intelligence of the movements of the royal armies was rapidly brought to court; and the dress of the courier, denoting by its colour the nature of his tidings, spread joy or consternation in the towns through which he passed.²

But the great aim of the Aztec institutions, to which private discipline and public honours were alike directed, was the profession of arms. In Mexico, as in Egypt, the soldier shared with the priest the highest consideration. The king, as we have seen, must be an experienced warrior. The tutelary deity of the Aztecs was the god of war. A great object of their military expeditions was to gather hecatombs of captives for his altars. The soldier who fell in battle was transported at once to the region of ineffable bliss in the bright mansions of the Sun.³ Every war, therefore, became a crusade; and the warrior, animated by a religious enthusiasm like that of the early Saracen or the Christian crusader, was not only raised to a contempt of danger, but courted it, for the imperishable crown of martyrdom. Thus we find the same impulse acting in the most opposite quarters of the globe, and the Asiatic, the European, and the American, each earnestly invoking the holy name of religion in the perpetration of human butchery.

The question of war was discussed in a council of the king and his chief nobles. Ambassadors were sent, previously to its declaration, to require the hostile state to receive the Mexican gods and to pay the customary tribute. The persons of ambassadors were held sacred throughout Anahuac. They were lodged and entertained in the great towns at the public charge, and were everywhere received with courtesy, so long as they did not deviate from the highroads on their route. When they did, they forfeited their privileges. If the embassy proved unsuccessful, a defiance, or open declaration of war, was sent; quotas were drawn from the conquered provinces, which were always subjected to military

¹ The Hon. C. A. Murray, whose imperturbable good-humour under real troubles forms a contrast, rather striking, to the sensitiveness of some of his predecessors to imaginary ones, tells us, among other marvels, that an Indian of his party travelled a hundred miles in four-and-twenty hours. (*Travels in North America* (New York, 1839), vol. i. p. 193.) The Greek who, according to Plutarch, brought the news of victory to Plataea, a hundred and twenty-five miles, in a day, was a better traveller still. Some interesting facts on the pedestrian capabilities of man in the savage state are collected by Buffon, who concludes, truly enough, "L'homme civilisé ne connaît pas ses forces." (*Histoire naturelle: De la Jeunesse.*)

² Torquemada, *Monarch. Ind.*, lib. 14, cap. 1.—The same wants led to the same expedients in ancient Rome, and still more ancient Persia.

"Nothing in the world is borne so swiftly," says Herodotus, "as messages by the Persian couriers;" which his commentator Valckenaer prudently qualifies by the exception of the carrier-pigeon. (Herodotus, *Hist.*, *Urania*, sec. 98, nec non Adnot. ed. Schweighäuser.) Couriers are noticed, in the thirteenth century, in China, by Marco Polo. Their stations were only three miles apart, and they accomplished five days' journey in one. (*Viaggi di Marco Polo*, lib. 2, cap. 20, ap. Ramusio, tom. ii.) A similar arrangement for posts subsists there at the present day, and excites the admiration of a modern traveller. (Anderson, *British Embassy to China* (London, 1796), p. 282.) In all these cases, the posts were for the use of government only.

³ Sahagun, *Hist. de Nueva-España*, lib. 3, Apend., cap. 3

service, as well as the payment of taxes ; and the royal army, usually with the monarch at its head, began its march.¹

The Aztec princes made use of the incentives employed by European monarchs to excite the ambition of their followers. They established various military orders, each having its privileges and peculiar insignia. There seems, also, to have existed a sort of knighthood, of inferior degree. It was the cheapest reward of martial prowess, and whoever had not reached it was excluded from using ornaments on his arms or his person, and obliged to wear a coarse white stuff, made from the threads of the aloe, called *nequen*. Even the members of the royal family were not excepted from this law, which reminds one of the occasional practice of Christian knights, to wear plain armour, or shields without device, till they had achieved some doughty feat of chivalry. Although the military orders were thrown open to all, it is probable that they were chiefly filled with persons of rank, who, by their previous training and connections, were able to come into the field under peculiar advantages.²

The dress of the higher warriors was picturesque and often magnificent. Their bodies were covered with a close vest of quilted cotton, so thick as to be impenetrable to the light missiles of Indian warfare. This garment was so light and serviceable that it was adopted by the Spaniards. The wealthier chiefs sometimes wore, instead of this cotton mail, a cuirass made of thin plates of gold or silver. Over it was thrown a surcoat of the gorgeous feather-work in which they excelled.³ Their helmets were sometimes of wood, fashioned like the heads of wild animals, and sometimes of silver, on the top of which waved a *panache* of variegated plumes, sprinkled with precious stones and ornaments of gold. They wore also collars, bracelets, and earrings of the same rich materials.⁴

Their armies were divided into bodies of eight thousand men ; and these, again, into companies of three or four hundred, each with its own commander. The national standard, which has been compared to the ancient Roman, displayed, in its embroidery of gold and feather-work, the armorial ensigns of the state. These were significant of its name, which, as the names of both persons and places were borrowed from some material object, was easily expressed by hieroglyphical symbols. The companies and the great chiefs had also their appropriate banners and devices, and the gaudy hues of their many-coloured plumes gave a dazzling splendour to the spectacle.

¹ Zurita, Rapport, pp. 68, 120.—Col. of Mendoza, ap. Antiq. of Mexico, vol. i. Pl. 67 ; vol. vi. p. 74.—Torquemada, Monarch. Ind., lib. 14, cap. 1.—The reader will find a remarkable resemblance to these military usages in those of the early Romans. Comp. Liv., Hist., lib. 1, cap. 32 ; lib. 4, cap. 30, et alibi.

² Ibid., lib. 14, cap. 4, 5.—Acosta, lib. 6, ch. 26.—Col. of Mendoza, ap. Antiq. of Mexico, vol. i. Pl. 65 ; vol. vi. p. 72.—Camargo, Hist. de Tlascala, MS.

³ "Their mail, if mail it may be called, was woven Of vegetable down, like finest flax, Bleached to the whiteness of new-fallen snow.

Others, of higher office, were arrayed

In feathery breastplates, of more gorgeous hue Than the gay plumage of the mountain-cock, Than the pheasant's glittering pride. But what were these, Or what the thin gold hauber, when opposed To arms like ours in battle?"

Madoc, Part 1, canto 7.

Beautiful painting ! One may doubt, however, the propriety of the Welshman's vaunt, before the use of firearms.

⁴ Sahagun, Hist. de Nueva-España, lib. 2, cap. 27 ; lib. 8, cap. 12.—Relatione d'un gentil' huomo, ap. Ramusio, tom. iii. p. 305.—Torquemada, Monarch. Ind., ubi supra.

Their tactics were such as belong to a nation with whom war, though a trade, is not elevated to the rank of a science. They advanced singing, and shouting their war-cries, briskly charging the enemy, as rapidly retreating, and making use of ambuscades, sudden surprises, and the light skirmish of guerilla warfare. Yet their discipline was such as to draw forth the encomiums of the Spanish conquerors. "A beautiful sight it was," says one of them, "to see them set out on their march, all moving forward so gayly, and in so admirable order!"¹ In battle they did not seek to kill their enemies, so much as to take them prisoners; and they never scalped, like other North American tribes. The valour of a warrior was estimated by the number of his prisoners; and no ransom was large enough to save the devoted captive.²

Their military code bore the same stern features as their other laws. Disobedience of orders was punished with death. It was death, also, for a soldier to leave his colours, to attack the enemy before the signal was given, or to plunder another's booty or prisoners. One of the last Tezcucan princes, in the spirit of an ancient Roman, put two sons to death—after having cured their wounds—for violating the last-mentioned law.³

I must not omit to notice here an institution the introduction of which in the Old World is ranked among the beneficent fruits of Christianity. Hospitals were established in the principal cities, for the cure of the sick and the permanent refuge of the disabled soldier; and surgeons were placed over them, "who were so far better than those in Europe," says an old chronicler, "that they did not protract the cure in order to increase the pay."⁴

Such is the brief outline of the civil and military polity of the ancient Mexicans; less perfect than could be desired in regard to the former, from the imperfection of the sources whence it is drawn. Whoever has had occasion to explore the early history of modern Europe has found how vague and unsatisfactory is the political information which can be gleaned from the gossip of monkish annalists. How much is the difficulty increased in the present instance, where this information, first recorded in the dubious language of hieroglyphics, was interpreted in another language, with which the Spanish chroniclers were imperfectly acquainted, while it related to institutions of which their past experience enabled them to form no adequate conception! Amidst such uncertain lights, it is in vain to expect nice accuracy of detail. All that can be done is to attempt an outline of the more prominent features, that a correct impression, so far as it goes, may be produced on the mind of the reader.

¹ *Relatione d'un gentil' huomo*, ubi supra.

² Col. of Mendoza, ap. *Antiq. of Mexico*, vol. i. Pl. 65, 66; vol. vi. p. 73.—Sahagun, *Hist. de Nueva-España*, lib. 8, cap. 12.—Toribio, *Hist. de los Indios*, MS., Parte I. cap. 7.—Torquemada, *Monarch. Ind.*, lib. 14, cap. 3.—*Relatione d'un gentil' huomo*, ap. Ramusio, loc. cit.—Scalping may claim high authority, or, at least, antiquity. The Father of History gives an account of it among the Scythians, showing that they performed the operation, and wore

the hideous trophy, in the same manner as our North American Indians. (Herodot., *Hist.*, Melpomene, sec. 64.) Traces of the same savage custom are also found in the laws of the Visigoths, among the Franks, and even the Anglo-Saxons. See Guizot, *Cours d'Histoire moderne* (Paris, 1829), tom. i. p. 283.

³ *Ixtlilxochitl*, *Hist. Chich.*, MS., cap. 67.
⁴ Torquemada, *Monarch. Ind.*, lib. 12, cap. 6; lib. 14, cap. 3.—*Ixtlilxochitl*, *Hist. Chich.*, MS., cap. 36.

Enough has been said, however, to show that the Aztec and Tezcucan races were advanced in civilization very far beyond the wandering tribes of North America.¹ The degree of civilization which they had reached, as inferred by their political institutions, may be considered, perhaps, not much short of that enjoyed by our Saxon ancestors under Alfred. In respect to the nature of it, they may be better compared with the Egyptians; and the examination of their social relations and culture may suggest still stronger points of resemblance to that ancient people.

Those familiar with the modern Mexicans will find it difficult to conceive that the nation should ever have been capable of devising the enlightened polity which we have been considering. But they should remember that in the Mexicans of our day they see only a conquered race; as different from their ancestors as are the modern Egyptians from those who built,—I will not say, the tasteless pyramids,—but the temples and palaces whose magnificent wrecks strew the borders of the Nile, at Luxor and Karnac. The difference is not so great as between the ancient Greek, and his degenerate descendant, lounging among the masterpieces of art which he has scarcely taste enough to admire,—speaking the language of those still more imperishable monuments of literature which he has hardly capacity to comprehend. Yet he breathes the same atmosphere, is warmed by the same sun, nourished by the same scenes, as those who fell at Marathon and won the trophies of Olympic Pisa. The same blood flows in his veins that flowed in theirs. But ages of tyranny have passed over him; he belongs to a conquered race.

The American Indian has something peculiarly sensitive in his nature. He shrinks instinctively from the rude touch of a foreign hand. Even when this foreign influence comes in the form of civilization, he seems to sink and pine away beneath it. It has been so with the Mexicans. Under the Spanish domination, their numbers have silently melted away. Their energies are broken. They no longer tread their mountain plains with the conscious independence of their ancestors. In their faltering step and meek and melancholy aspect we read the sad characters of the conquered race. The cause of humanity, indeed, has gained. They live under a better system of laws, a more assured tranquillity, a purer faith.

¹ Zurita is indignant at the epithet of *barbarians* bestowed on the Aztecs; an epithet, he says, "which could come from no one who had personal knowledge of the capacity of the people or their institutions, and which in some respects is quite as well merited by the European nations." (Rapport, p. 200, et seq.) This is strong language. Yet no one had better means of knowing than this eminent jurist, who for nineteen years held a post in the royal *audiencias* of New Spain. During his long residence in the country he had ample opportunity of acquainting himself with its usages, both through his own personal observation and intercourse with the natives; and through the first missionaries who came over after the Conquest. On his return to Spain, probably about 1560, he occupied himself with an answer to queries which had been propounded by the government, on the character of

the Aztec laws and institutions, and on that of the modifications introduced by the Spaniards. Much of his treatise is taken up with the latter subject. In what relates to the former he is more brief than could be wished, from the difficulty, perhaps, of obtaining full and satisfactory information as to the details. As far as he goes, however, he manifests a sound and discriminating judgment. He is very rarely betrayed into the extravagance of expression so visible in the writers of the time; and this temperance, combined with his uncommon sources of information, makes his work one of highest authority on the limited topics within its range. The original manuscript was consulted by Clavigero, and, indeed, has been used by other writers. The work is now accessible to all, as one of the series of translations from the pen of the indefatigable Ternaux.

But all does not avail. Their civilization was of the hardy character which belongs to the wilderness. The fierce virtues of the Aztec were all his own. They refused to submit to European culture,—to be engrafted on a foreign stock. His outward form, his complexion, his lineaments, are substantially the same; but the moral characteristics of the nation, all that constituted its individuality as a race, are effaced for ever.

Two of the principal authorities for this chapter are Torquemada and Clavigero. The former, a Provincial of the Franciscan order, came to the New World about the middle of the sixteenth century. As the generation of the Conquerors had not then passed away, he had ample opportunities of gathering the particulars of their enterprise from their own lips. Fifty years, during which he continued in the country, put him in possession of the traditions and usages of the natives, and enabled him to collect their history from the earliest missionaries, as well as from such monuments as the fanaticism of his own countrymen had not then destroyed. From these ample sources he compiled his bulky tomes, beginning, after the approved fashion of the ancient Castilian chroniclers, with the creation of the world, and embracing the whole circle of the Mexican institutions, political, religious, and social, from the earliest period to his own time. In handling these fruitful themes, the worthy father has shown a full measure of the bigotry which belonged to his order at that period. Every page, too, is loaded with illustrations from Scripture or profane history, which form a whimsical contrast to the barbaric staple of his story; and he has sometimes fallen into serious errors, from his misconception of the chronological system of the Aztecs. But, notwithstanding these glaring defects in the composition of the work, the student, aware of his author's infirmities, will find few better guides than Torquemada in tracing the stream of historic truth up to the fountain-head; such is his manifest integrity, and so great were his facilities for information on the most curious points of Mexican antiquity. No work, accordingly, has been more largely consulted and copied, even by some who, like Herrera, have affected to set little value on the sources whence its information was drawn. (Hist. general, dec. 6, lib. 6, cap. 19.) The *Monarchia Indiana* was first published at Seville, 1615 (Nic. Antonio, Bibliotheca Nova (Matriti, 1783), tom. ii. p. 787), and since, in a better style, in three volumes folio, at Madrid, in 1723.

The other authority, frequently cited in the preceding pages, is the Abbé Clavigero's *Storia antica del Messico*. It was originally printed towards the close of the last century, in the Italian language, and in Italy, whither the author, a native of Vera Cruz, and a member of the order of the Jesuits, had retired, on the expulsion of that body from Spanish America, in 1767. During a residence of thirty-five years in his own country, Clavigero had made himself intimately acquainted with its antiquities, by the careful examination of paintings, manuscripts, and such other remains as were to be found in his day. The plan of his work is nearly as comprehensive as that of his predecessor, Torquemada; but the later and more cultivated period in which he wrote is visible in the superior address with which he has managed his complicated subject. In the elaborate disquisitions in his concluding volume, he has done much to rectify the chronology and the various inaccuracies of preceding writers. Indeed, an avowed object of his work was to vindicate his countrymen from what he conceived to be the misrepresentations of Robertson, Raynal, and De Pau. In regard to the last two he was perfectly successful. Such an ostensible design might naturally suggest unfavourable ideas of his impartiality. But, on the whole, he seems to have conducted the discussion with good faith; and if he has been led by national zeal to overcharge the picture with brilliant colours, he will be found much more temperate, in this respect, than those who preceded him, while he has applied sound principles of criticism, of which they were incapable. In a word, the diligence of his researches has gathered into one focus the scattered lights of tradition

and antiquarian lore, purified in a great measure from the mists of superstition which obscure the best productions of an earlier period. From these causes, the work, notwithstanding its occasional prolixity, and the disagreeable aspect given to it by the profusion of uncouth names in the Mexican orthography, which bristle over every page, has found merited favour with the public, and created something like a popular interest in the subject. Soon after its publication at Cesena, in 1780, it was translated into English and more lately into Spanish and German.

CHAPTER III.

MEXICAN MYTHOLOGY.—THE SACERDOTAL ORDER.—THE TEMPLES.— HUMAN SACRIFICES.

THE civil polity of the Aztecs is so closely blended with their religion that without understanding the latter it is impossible to form correct ideas of their government or their social institutions. I shall pass over, for the present, some remarkable traditions, bearing a singular resemblance to those found in the Scriptures, and endeavour to give a brief sketch of their mythology and their careful provisions for maintaining a national worship.

Mythology may be regarded as the poetry of religion, or rather as the poetic development of the religious principle in a primitive age. It is the effort of untutored man to explain the mysteries of existence, and the secret agencies by which the operations of nature are conducted. Although the growth of similar conditions of society, its character must vary with that of the rude tribes in which it originates; and the ferocious Goth, quaffing mead from the skulls of his slaughtered enemies, must have a very different mythology from that of the effeminate native of Hispaniola, loitering away his hours in idle pastimes, under the shadow of his bananas.

At a later and more refined period, we sometimes find these primitive legends combined into a regular system under the hands of the poet, and the rude outline moulded into forms of ideal beauty, which are the objects of adoration in a credulous age, and the delight of all succeeding ones. Such were the beautiful inventions of Hesiod and Homer, "who," says the Father of History, "created the theogony of the Greeks;" an assertion not to be taken too literally, since it is hardly possible that any man should create a religious system for his nation.¹ They only filled up the shadowy outlines of tradition with the bright touches of their own imaginations, until they had clothed them in beauty which kindled the imaginations of others. The power of the poet, indeed, may be felt in a similar way in a much riper period of society. To say nothing of the "Divina Commedia," who is there that rises from the perusal of "Paradise Lost"

¹ *πολλοὶ πάντες θεογονίην* ἔλλαττον. Herodotus, Euterpe, sec. 53.—Heeren hazards a remark equally strong, respecting the epic poets of India, "who,"

says he, "have supplied the numerous gods that fill her Pantheon." Historical Researches, Eng. trans. (Oxford, 1833), vol. iii. p. 139.

without feeling his own conceptions of the angelic hierarchy quickened by those of the inspired artist, and a new and sensible form, as it were, given to images which had before floated dim and undefined before him?

The last-mentioned period is succeeded by that of philosophy; which, disclaiming alike the legends of the primitive age and the poetical embellishments of the succeeding one, seeks to shelter itself from the charge of impiety by giving an allegorical interpretation to the popular mythology, and thus to reconcile the latter with the genuine deductions of science.

The Mexican religion had emerged from the first of the periods we have been considering, and, although little affected by poetical influences, had received a peculiar complexion from the priests, who had digested as thorough and burdensome a ceremonial as ever existed in any nation. They had, moreover, thrown the veil of allegory over early tradition, and invested their deities with attributes savouring much more of the grotesque conceptions of the Eastern nations in the Old World, than of the lighter fictions of Greek mythology, in which the features of humanity, however exaggerated, were never wholly abandoned.¹

In contemplating the religious system of the Aztecs, one is struck with its apparent incongruity, as if some portion of it had emanated from a comparatively refined people, open to gentle influences, while the rest breathes a spirit of unmitigated ferocity. It naturally suggests the idea of two distinct sources, and authorizes the belief that the Aztecs had inherited from their predecessors a milder faith, on which was afterwards engrafted their own mythology. The latter soon became dominant, and gave its dark colouring to the creeds of the conquered nations,—which the Mexicans, like the ancient Romans, seem willingly to have incorporated into their own,—until the same funereal superstition settled over the farthest borders of Anahuac.

The Aztecs recognized the existence of a supreme Creator and Lord of the universe. They addressed him, in their prayers, as “the God by whom we live,” “omnipresent, that knoweth all thoughts, and giveth all gifts,” “without whom man is as nothing,” “invisible, incorporeal, one God, of *perfect perfection* and purity,” “under whose wings we find repose and a sure defence.” These sublime attributes infer no inadequate conception of the true God. But the idea of unity—of a being with whom volition is action, who has no need of inferior ministers to execute his purposes—was too simple, or too vast, for their understandings; and they sought relief, as usual, in a plurality of deities, who presided over the elements, the changes of the seasons, and the various occupations of man.² Of these, there were thirteen principal deities, and more than two hundred

¹ The Hon. Mountstuart Elphinstone has fallen into a similar train of thought, in a comparison of the Hindoo and Greek Mythology, in his “History of India,” published since the remarks in the text were written. (See Book I. ch. 4.) The same chapter of this truly philosophic work suggests some curious points of resemblance to the Aztec

religious institutions, that may furnish pertinent illustrations to the mind bent on tracing the affinities of the Asiatic and American races.

² Ritter has well shown, by the example of the Hindoo system, how the idea of unity suggests, of itself, that of plurality. History of Ancient Philosophy, Eng. trans. (Oxford, 1838), book 2, ch. 1.

inferior; to each of whom some special day or appropriate festival was consecrated.¹

At the head of all stood the terrible Huitzilopochtli, the Mexican Mars; although it is doing injustice to the heroic war-god of antiquity to identify him with this sanguinary monster. This was the patron deity of the nation. His fantastic image was loaded with costly ornaments. His temples were the most stately and august of the public edifices; and his altars reeked with the blood of human hecatombs in every city of the empire. Disastrous indeed must have been the influence of such a superstition on the character of the people.²

A far more interesting personage in their mythology was Quetzalcoatl, god of the air, a divinity who, during his residence on earth, instructed the natives in the use of metals, in agriculture, and in the arts of government. He was one of those benefactors of their species, doubtless, who have been deified by the gratitude of posterity. Under him, the earth teemed with fruits and flowers, without the pains of culture. An ear of Indian corn was as much as a single man could carry. The cotton, as it grew, took, of its own accord, the rich dyes of human art. The air was filled with

¹ Sahagun, *Hist. de Nueva-España*, lib. 6, passim.—Acosta, lib. 5, ch. 9.—Boturini, *Idea*, p. 8, et seq.—Ixtilxochitl, *Hist. Chich.*, MS., cap. 1.—Camargo, *Hist. de Tlascala*, MS.—The Mexicans, according to Clavigero, believed in an evil Spirit, the enemy of the human race, whose barbarous name signified "Rational Owl." (Stor. del Messico, tom. ii. p. 2.) The curate Bernaldez speaks of the Devil being embroidered on the dresses of Columbus's Indians, in the likeness of an owl. (*Historia de los Reyes Católicos*, MS., cap. 131.) This must not be confounded, however, with the evil Spirit in the mythology of the North American Indians (see Hecke-welder's Account, ap. Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, vol. i. p. 205), still less with the evil Principle of the Oriental nations of the Old World. It was only one among many deities, for evil was found too liberally mingled in the natures of most of the Aztec gods—in the same manner as with the Greeks—to admit of its personification by any one.

² Sahagun, *Hist. de Nueva-España*, lib. 3, cap. 1, et seq.—Acosta, lib. 5, ch. 9.—Torquemada, *Monarch. Ind.*, lib. 6, cap. 21.—Boturini, *Idea*, pp. 27, 28.—Huitzilopochtli is compounded of two words, signifying "humming-bird," and "left," from his image having the feathers of this bird on its left foot (Clavigero, Stor. del Messico, tom. ii. p. 17); an amiable etymology for so rufian a deity.—The fantastic forms of the Mexican idols were in the highest degree symbolical. See Gama's learned

exposition of the devices on the statue of the goddess found in the great square of Mexico. (Description de las Dos Piedras (México, 1832), Parte 1, pp. 34-44.) The tradition respecting the origin of this god, or, at least, his appearance on earth, is curious. He was born of a woman. His mother, a devout person, one day, in her attendance on the temple, saw a ball of bright-coloured feathers floating in the air. She took it, and deposited it in her bosom. She soon after found herself pregnant, and the dread deity was born, coming into the world, like Minerva, all armed,—with a spear in the right hand, a shield in the left, and his head surmounted by a crest of green plumes. (See Clavigero, Stor. del Messico, tom. ii. p. 10, et seq.) A similar notion in respect to the incarnation of their principal deity existed among the people of India beyond the Ganges, of China, and of Thibet. "Budh," says Milman, in his learned and luminous work on the History of Christianity, "according to a tradition known in the West, was born of a virgin. So were the Fohi of China, and the Schakaof Thibet, no doubt the same, whether a mythic or a real personage. The Jesuits in China, says Barrow, were appalled at finding in the mythology of that country the counterpart of the Virgo Deipara." (Vol. i. p. 99, note.) The existence of similar religious ideas in remote regions, inhabited by different races, is an interesting subject of study; furnishing, as it does, one of the most important links in the great chain of communication which binds together the distant families of nations.

* [The name may possibly have referred to the whispered oracles and intimations in dreams—such as "a little bird of the air" is still fabled to convey—by which, according to the legend, the deity had guided his people in their migrations and conquests. That it had a symbolical meaning will hardly be doubted, and M. Brasseur de Bourbourg, who had originally explained it as "Huitzil the Left-handed,"—the proper name of a deified hero with the addition of a descriptive epithet,—has since found one of too deep an import to be briefly expounded or easily understood. (Quatre Lettres sur le Mexique (Paris, 1866), p. 201, et al.) *Mexitli*, another name of the same deity, is translated "the hare of the aloes." In some accounts the two are distinct personages. Mythological science rejects the legend, and regards the Aztec war-god as a "nature-deity," a personification of the lightning, this being a natural type of warlike might, of which the common symbol, the serpent, was represented among the decorations of the idol. (Myths of the New World, p. 118.) More commonly he has been identified with the sun, and Mr. Tylor, while declining "to attempt a general solution of this inextricable compound parthenogenetic deity," notices the association of his principal festival with the winter's solstice, and the fact that his paste idol was then shot through with an arrow, as tending to show that the life and death of the deity were emblematic of the year's, "while his functions of war-god may have been of later addition." Primitive Culture, tom. ii. p. 277.—Ed.]

intoxicating perfumes and the sweet melody of birds. In short, these were the halcyon days, which find a place in the mythic systems of so many nations in the Old World. It was the *golden age* of Anahuac.

From some cause, not explained, Quetzalcoatl incurred the wrath of one of the principal gods, and was compelled to abandon the country. On his way he stopped at the city of Cholula, where a temple was dedicated to his worship, the massy ruins of which still form one of the most interesting relics of antiquity in Mexico. When he reached the shores of the Mexican Gulf, he took leave of his followers, promising that he and his descendants would revisit them hereafter, and then, entering his wizard skiff, made of serpents' skins, embarked on the great ocean for the fabled land of Tlapallan. He was said to have been tall in stature, with a white skin, long, dark hair, and a flowing beard. The Mexicans looked confidently to the return of the benevolent deity; and this remarkable tradition, deeply cherished in their hearts, prepared the way, as we shall see hereafter, for the future success of the Spaniards.¹

¹ Codex Vaticanus, Pl. 15, and Codex Telleriano-Remensis, Part. 2, Pl. 2, ap. Antiq. of Mexico, vols. i., vi.—Sahagun, Hist. de Nueva-España, lib. 3, cap. 3, 4, 13, 14.—Torquemada, Monarch. Ind., lib. 6, cap. 24.—Ixtilxochitl, Hist. Chich., MS., cap. 1.—Gomara, Crónica de la Nueva-España, cap. 222, ap. Barcia, Historiadores primitivos de las Indias Occidentales (Madrid, 1749), tom. ii.—Quetzalcoatl signifies "feathered serpent." The last syllable means, likewise, a "twin;" which furnished an argument for Dr. Sigüenza, to identify this god with the apostle Thomas (Didymus signifying also a twin), who, he supposes, came over to America to preach the gospel. In this rather start-

ling conjecture he is supported by several of his devout countrymen, who appear to have as little doubt of the fact as of the advent of St. James, for a similar purpose, in the mother-country. See the various authorities and arguments set forth with becoming gravity in Dr. Mier's dissertation in Bustamante's edition of Sahagun (lib. 3, Suplem.), and Veytia (tom. i. pp. 160-200). Our ingenious countryman McCulloh carries the Aztec god up to a still more respectable antiquity, by identifying him with the patriarch Noah. Researches, Philosophical and Antiquarian, concerning the Aboriginal History of America (Baltimore, 1829), p. 233.*

* [Under the modern system of mythical interpretation, which has been applied by Dr. Brinton with singular force and ingenuity to the traditions of the New World, Quetzalcoatl, "the central figure of Toltec mythology," with the corresponding figures found in the legends of the Mayas, Quichés, Peruvians, and other races, loses all personal existence, and becomes a creation of that primitive religious sentiment which clothed the uncomprehended powers of nature with the attributes of divinity. His name, "Bird-Serpent," unites the emblems of the wind and the lightning. "He is both lord of the eastern light and the winds. As the former, he was born of a virgin in the land of Tula or Tlapallan, in the distant Orient, and was high-priest of that happy realm. The morning star was his symbol. . . . Like all the dawn heroes, he too was represented as of white complexion, clothed in long white robes, and, as most of the Aztec gods, with a full and flowing beard. When his earthly work was done, he too returned to the east, assigning as a reason that the sun, the ruler of Tlapallan, demanded his presence. But the real motive was that he had been overcome by Tezcatlipoca, otherwise called Yoalliehecatl, the wind or spirit of the night, who had descended from heaven by a spider's web and presented his rival with a draught pretended to confer immortality, but, in fact, producing uncontrollable longing for home. For the wind and the light both depart when the gloaming draws near, or when the clouds spread their dark and shadowy webs along the mountains and pour the vivifying rain upon the fields. . . . Wherever he went, all manner of singing-birds bore him company, emblems of the whistling breezes. When he finally disappeared in the far east, he sent back four trusty youths, who had ever shared his fortunes, incomparably swift and light of foot, with directions to divide the earth between them and rule it till he should return and resume his power." (The Myths of the New World, p. 180, et seq.) So far as mere physical attributes are concerned, this analysis may be accepted as a satisfactory elucidation of the class of figures to which it relates. But the grand and distinguishing characteristic of these figures is the moral and intellectual eminence ascribed to them. They are invested with the highest qualities of humanity,—attributes neither drawn from the external phenomena of nature nor born of any rude sentiment of wonder and fear. Their lives and doctrines are in strong contrast with those of the ordinary divinities of the same or other lands, and they are objects not of a propitiatory worship, but of a pious veneration. Can we, then, assent to the conclusion that under this aspect also they were "wholly mythical," "creations of the religious fancy," "ideals summing up in themselves the best traits, the most approved virtues, of whole nations"? (Ibid., pp. 293, 294.) This would seem to imply that nations may attain to lofty conceptions of moral truth and excellence by a process of selection, without any standard or point of view furnished by living embodiments of the ideal. But this would be as impossible as to arrive at conceptions of the highest forms and ideas of art independently of the special genius and actual productions of the artist. In the one case, as in the other, the ideal is derived originally from examples shaped by finer and deeper intuitions than those of the masses. "Im Anfang war die That." The mere fact, therefore, that the Mexican people recognized an exalted ideal of purity and wisdom is a sufficient proof that men had existed among them who displayed these qualities in an eminent degree. The status of their civilization, imperfect as it was, can be accounted for only in the same way. Compara-

We have not space for further details respecting the Mexican divinities, the attributes of many of whom were carefully defined, as they descended, in regular gradation, to the *penates* or household gods, whose little images were to be found in the humblest dwelling.

The Aztecs felt the curiosity, common to man in almost every stage of civilization, to lift the veil which covers the mysterious past and the more awful future. They sought relief, like the nations of the Old Continent, from the oppressive idea of eternity, by breaking it up into distinct cycles, or periods of time, each of several thousand years' duration. There were four of these cycles, and at the end of each, by the agency of one of the elements, the human family was swept from the earth, and the sun blotted out from the heavens, to be again rekindled:¹

They imagined three separate states of existence in the future life. The wicked, comprehending the greater part of mankind, were to expiate their sins in a place of everlasting darkness. Another class, with no other merit than that of having died of certain diseases capriciously selected, were to enjoy a negative existence of indolent contentment. The highest place was reserved, as in most warlike nations, for the heroes who fell in battle, or in sacrifice. They passed at once into the presence of the Sun, whom they accompanied with songs and choral dances in his bright progress through the heavens; and, after some years, their spirits went to animate the clouds and singing-birds of beautiful plumage, and to revel amidst the rich blossoms and odours of the gardens of paradise.² Such was the heaven of the Aztecs; more refined in its character than that of the more polished pagan, whose elysium reflected only the martial sports or sensual gratifications of this life.³ In the destiny they assigned to the wicked, we discern similar traces of refinement; since the absence of all physical torture forms a striking

¹ Cod. Vat., Pl. 7-10, Antiq. of Mexico, vols. i., vi.—Ixtilxochitl, Hist. Chich., MS., cap. 1.—M. de Humboldt has been at some pains to trace the analogy between the Aztec cosmogony and that of Eastern Asia. He has tried, though in vain, to find a multiple which might serve as the key to the calculations of the former. (Vues des Cordillères, pp. 202-212.) In truth, there seems to be a material discordance in the Mexican statements, both in regard to the number of revolutions and their duration. A manuscript before me, of Ixtilxochitl, reduces them to three, before the present state of the world, and allows only 4394 years for them (Sumaria Relacion, MS., No. 1); Gama, on the faith of an ancient Indian MS. in Boturini's Catalogue (viii. 13), reduces the duration still lower (Description de las Dos Piedras, Parte 1, p. 49, et seq.); while the cycles of the Vatican paintings take up near 18,000 years.—It is interesting to observe how the wild conjectures of an ignorant age have been confirmed by the more recent discoveries in geology, making it probable that the earth has experienced a number of convulsions, possibly thousands of years distant from each other, which have swept away the races then existing, and given a new aspect to the globe.

² Sahagun, Hist. de Nueva-España, lib. 3, Apend.—Cod. Vat., ap. Antiq. of Mexico, Pl. 1-5.—Torquemada, Monarch. Ind., lib. 13, cap. 48.—The last writer assures us "that, as to what the Aztecs said of their going to hell, they were right; for, as they died in ignorance of the true faith, they have, without question, all gone there to suffer everlasting punishment"! Ubi supra.

³ It conveys but a poor idea of these pleasures, that the shade of Achilles can say "he had rather be the slave of the meanest man on earth, than sovereign among the dead." (Odys., A. 488-490.) The Mahometans believe that the souls of martyrs pass, after death, into the bodies of birds, that haunt the sweet waters and bowers of Paradise. (Sale's Koran (London, 1825), vol. i. p. 106.)—The Mexican heaven may remind one of Dante's, in its material enjoyments; which, in both, are made up of light, music, and motion. The sun, it must also be remembered, was a spiritual conception with the Aztec:—

"He sees with other eyes than theirs; where they
Behold a sun, he spies a deity."

tive mythology may resolve into its original elements a personification of the forces of nature woven by the religious fancy of primitive races, but it cannot sever that chain of discoverers and civilizers by which mankind has been drawn from the abysses of savage ignorance, and by which its progress, when uninterrupted, has been always maintained.—ED.]

contrast to the schemes of suffering so ingeniously devised by the fancies of the most enlightened nations.¹ In all this, so contrary to the natural suggestions of the ferocious Aztec, we see the evidences of a higher civilization,² inherited from their predecessors in the land.

Our limits will allow only a brief allusion to one or two of their most interesting ceremonies. On the death of a person, his corpse was dressed in the peculiar habiliments of his tutelar deity. It was strewed with pieces of paper, which operated as charms against the dangers of the dark road he was to travel. A throng of slaves, if he were rich, was sacrificed at his obsequies. His body was burned, and the ashes, collected in a vase, were preserved in one of the apartments of his house. Here we have successively the usages of the Roman Catholic, the Mussulman, the Tartar, and the ancient Greek and Roman; curious coincidences, which may show how cautious we should be in adopting conclusions founded on analogy.³

A more extraordinary coincidence may be traced with Christian rites, in the ceremony of naming their children. The lips and bosom of the infant were sprinkled with water, and "the Lord was implored to permit the holy drops to wash away the sin that was given to it before the foundation of the world; so that the child might be born anew."⁴ We are reminded of Christian morals, in more than one of their prayers, in which they used regular forms. "Wilt thou blot us out, O Lord, for ever? Is this punishment intended, not for our reformation, but for our destruction?" Again, "Impart to us, out of thy great mercy, thy gifts, which we are not worthy to receive through our own merits." "Keep peace with all," says another petition; "bear injuries with humility; God, who sees, will avenge you." But the most striking parallel with Scripture is in the remarkable declaration that "he who looks too curiously on a woman commits adultery with his eyes."⁵ These pure and elevated maxims, it is true, are

¹ It is singular that the Tuscan bard, while exhausting his invention in devising modes of bodily torture, in his "Inferno," should have made so little use of the *moral* sources of misery. That he has not done so might be reckoned a strong proof of the rudeness of the time, did we not meet with examples of it in a later day; in which a serious and sublime writer, like Dr. Watts, does not disdain to employ the same coarse machinery for moving the conscience of the reader.

² [It should perhaps be regarded rather as evidence of a low civilization, since the absence of any strict ideas of retribution is a characteristic of the notions in regard to a future life entertained by savage races. See Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol. ii. p. 76, et seq.—Ed.]

³ Carta del Lic. Zuazo (Nov. 1521), MS.—Acosta, lib. 5, cap. 8.—Torquemada, *Monarch. Ind.*, lib. 13, cap. 45.—Sahagun, *Hist. de Nueva-España*, lib. 3, Apend.—Sometimes the body was buried entire, with valuable treasures, if the deceased was rich. The "Anonymous Conqueror," as he is called, saw gold to the value of 3000 castellanos drawn from one of these tombs. *Relazione d'un gentil' huomo*, ap. Ramusio, tom. iii. p. 310.

⁴ This interesting rite, usually solemnized with great formality, in the presence of the assembled friends and relatives, is detailed with minuteness by Sahagun (*Hist. de Nueva-España*, lib. 6, cap. 37), and by Zuazo (Carta, MS.), both of them eyewitnesses. For a version of part of Sahagun's account, see Appendix, Part 1, note 26.*

⁵ "¿Es posible que este azote y este castigo no se nos dá para nuestra correccion y enmienda, sino para total destruccion y asolamiento?" (Sahagun, *Hist. de Nueva-España*, lib. 6, cap. 1.) "Y esto por sola vuestra liberalidad y magnificencia lo habeis de hacer, que ninguno es digno ni merecedor de recibir vuestra largueza por su dignidad y merecimiento, sino que por vuestra benignidad." (*Ibid.*, lib. 6, cap. 2.) "Sed sufridos y reportados, que Dios bien os vé y responderá por vosotros, y él os vengará (á) sed humildes con todos, y con esto os hará Dios merced y tambien honra." (*Ibid.*, lib. 6, cap. 17.) "Tampoco mires con curiosidad el gesto y disposicion de la gente principal, mayormente de las mugeres, y sobre todo de las casadas, porque dice el refran que él que curiosamente mira á la muger adultera con la vista." (*Ibid.*, lib. 6, cap. 22.)

* [A similar rite of baptism, founded on the natural symbolism of the purifying power of water, was practised by other races in America, and had existed in the East, as the reader need hardly be told, long anterior to Christianity.—Ed.]

mixed up with others of a puerile, and even brutal character, arguing that confusion of the moral perceptions which is natural in the twilight of civilization. One would not expect, however, to meet, in such a state of society, with doctrines as sublime as any inculcated by the enlightened codes of ancient philosophy.¹

But, although the Aztec mythology gathered nothing from the beautiful inventions of the poet, or from the refinements of philosophy, it was much indebted, as I have noticed, to the priests, who endeavoured to dazzle the imagination of the people by the most formal and pompous ceremonial. The influence of the priesthood must be greatest in an imperfect state of civilization, where it engrosses all the scanty science of the time in its own body. This is particularly the case when the science is of that spurious kind which is less occupied with the real phenomena of nature than with the fanciful chimeras of human superstition. Such are the sciences of astrology and divination, in which the Aztec priests were well initiated; and, while they seemed to hold the keys of the future in their own hands, they impressed the ignorant people with sentiments of superstitious awe, beyond that which has probably existed in any other country,—even in ancient Egypt.

The sacerdotal order was very numerous; as may be inferred from the statement that five thousand priests were, in some way or other, attached to the principal temple in the capital. The various ranks and functions of this multitudinous body were discriminated with great exactness. Those best instructed in music took the management of the choirs. Others arranged the festivals conformably to the calendar. Some superintended the education of youth, and others had charge of the hieroglyphical paintings and oral traditions; while the dismal rites of sacrifice were reserved for the chief dignitaries of the order. At the head of the whole establishment were two high-priests, elected from the order, as it would seem, by the king and principal nobles, without reference to birth, but solely for their qualifications, as shown by their previous conduct in a subordinate station. They were equal in dignity, and inferior only to the sovereign, who rarely acted without their advice in weighty matters of public concern.²

¹ [On reviewing the remarkable coincidences shown in the above pages with the sentiments and even the phraseology of Scripture, we cannot but admit there is plausible ground for Mr. Gallatin's conjecture that the Mexicans, after the Conquest, attributed to their remote ancestors ideas which more properly belonged to a generation coeval with the Conquest, and brought into contact with the Europeans. "The substance," he remarks, "may be true; but several of the prayers convey elevated

and correct notions of a Supreme Being, which appear to me altogether inconsistent with that which we know to have been their practical religion and worship." * Transactions of the American Ethnological Society, i. 210.]

² Sahagun, *Hist. de Nueva-España*, lib. 2, Apend.; lib. 3, cap. 9.—Torquemada, *Monarch. Ind.*, lib. 8, cap. 20; lib. 9, cap. 3, 56.—Gomara, *Crón.* cap. 215, ap. Barcia, tom. ii.—Toribio, *Hist. de los Indios*, MS., Parte 1, cap. 4.—Clavigero says

* [It is evident that an inconsistency such as belongs to all religions, and to human nature in general, affords no sufficient ground for doubting the authenticity of the prayers reported by Sahagun. Similar specimens of prayers used by the Peruvians have been preserved, and, like those of the Aztecs, exhibit, in their recognition of spiritual as distinct from material blessings, a contrast to the forms of petition employed by the wholly uncivilized races of the north. They are in harmony with the purer conceptions of morality which those nations are admitted to have possessed, and which formed the real basis of their civilization.—ED.]

The priests were each devoted to the service of some particular deity; and had quarters provided within the spacious precincts of their temple, at least, while engaged in immediate attendance there,—for they were allowed to marry, and have families of their own. In this monastic residence they lived in all the stern severity of conventual discipline. Thrice during the day, and once at night, they were called to prayers. They were frequent in their ablutions and vigils, and mortified the flesh by fasting and cruel penance,—drawing blood from their bodies by flagellation, or by piercing them with the thorns of the aloe; in short, by practising all those austerities to which fanaticism (to borrow the strong language of the poet) has resorted, in every age of the world,

“In hopes to merit heaven by making earth a hell.”¹

The great cities were divided into districts placed under the charge of a sort of parochial clergy, who regulated every act of religion within their precincts. It is remarkable that they administered the rites of confession and absolution. The secrets of the confessional were held inviolable, and penances were imposed of much the same kind as those enjoined in the Roman Catholic Church. There were two remarkable peculiarities in the Aztec ceremony. The first was, that, as the repetition of an offence once atoned for was deemed inexpiable, confession was made but once in a man's life, and was usually deferred to a late period of it, when the penitent unburdened his conscience and settled at once the long arrears of iniquity. Another peculiarity was, that priestly absolution was received in place of the legal punishment of offences, and authorized an acquittal in case of arrest. Long after the Conquest, the simple natives, when they came under the arm of the law, sought to escape by producing the certificate of their confession.²

One of the most important duties of the priesthood was that of education, to which certain buildings were appropriated within the enclosure of the principal temple. Here the youth of both sexes, of the higher and middling orders, were placed at a very tender age. The girls were intrusted to the care of priestesses; for women were allowed to exercise

that the high-priest was necessarily a person of rank. (Stor. del Messico, tom. ii. p. 37.) I find no authority for this, not even in his oracle, Torquemada, who expressly says, “There is no warrant for the assertion, however probable the fact may be.” (Mon. Ind., lib. 9, cap. 5.) It is contradicted by Sahagun, whom I have followed as the highest authority in these matters. Clavigero had no other knowledge of Sahagun's work than what was filtered through the writings of Torquemada and later authors.

¹ Sahagun, Hist. de Nueva-España, ubi supra.—Torquemada, Monarch. Ind., lib. 9, cap. 25.—Gomara, Crón., ap. Barcia, ubi supra.—Acosta, lib. 5, cap. 14, 17.

² Sahagun, Hist. de Nueva-España, lib. 1, cap. 12; lib. 6, cap. 7.—The address of the confessor, on these occasions, contains some things too remarkable to be omitted. “O merciful Lord,” he says, in his

prayer, “thou who knowest the secrets of all hearts, let thy forgiveness and favour descend, like the pure waters of heaven, to wash away the stains from the soul. Thou knowest that this poor man has sinned *not from his own free-will*, but from the influence of the sign under which he was born.” After a copious exhortation to the penitent, enjoining a variety of mortifications and minute ceremonies by way of penance, and particularly urging the necessity of instantly procuring a *slave for sacrifice* to the Deity, the priest concludes with inculcating charity to the poor. “Clothe the naked and feed the hungry, whatever privations it may cost thee; for remember, *their flesh is like thine, and they are men like thee*.” Such is the strange medley of truly Christian benevolence and heathenish abominations which pervades the Aztec litany,—intimating sources widely different.

sacerdotal functions, except those of sacrifice.¹ In these institutions the boys were drilled in the routine of monastic discipline; they decorated the shrines of the gods with flowers, fed the sacred fires, and took part in the religious chants and festivals. Those in the higher school—the *Calmecac*, as it was called—were initiated in their traditionary lore, the mysteries of hieroglyphics, the principles of government, and such branches of astronomical and natural science as were within the compass of the priesthood. The girls learned various feminine employments, especially to weave and embroider rich coverings for the altars of the gods. Great attention was paid to the moral discipline of both sexes. The most perfect decorum prevailed; and offences were punished with extreme rigour, in some instances with death itself. Terror, not love, was the spring of education with the Aztecs.²

At a suitable age for marrying, or for entering into the world, the pupils were dismissed, with much ceremony, from the convent, and the recommendation of the principal often introduced those most competent to responsible situations in public life. Such was the crafty policy of the Mexican priests, who, by reserving to themselves the business of instruction, were enabled to mould the young and plastic mind according to their own wills, and to train it early to implicit reverence for religion and its ministers; a reverence which still maintained its hold on the iron nature of the warrior, long after every other vestige of education had been effaced by the rough trade to which he was devoted.

To each of the principal temples, lands were annexed for the maintenance of the priests. These estates were augmented by the policy or devotion of successive princes, until, under the last Montezuma, they had swollen to an enormous extent, and covered every district of the empire. The priests took the management of their property into their own hands; and they seem to have treated their tenants with the liberality and indulgence characteristic of monastic corporations. Besides the large supplies drawn from this source, the religious order was enriched with the first-fruits, and such other offerings as piety or superstition dictated. The surplus beyond what was required for the support of the national worship was distributed in alms among the poor; a duty strenuously prescribed by their moral code. Thus we find the same religion inculcating lessons of pure philanthropy, on the one hand, and of merciless extermination, as we shall soon

¹ The Egyptian gods were also served by priestesses. (See Herodotus, *Euterpe*, sec. 54.) Tales of scandal similar to those which the Greeks circulated respecting them, have been told of the Aztec virgins. (See Le Noir's dissertation, *ap. Antiquités Mexicaines* (Paris, 1834), tom. ii. p. 7, note.) The early missionaries, credulous enough, certainly, give no countenance to such reports; and Father Acosta, on the contrary, exclaims, "In truth, it is very strange to see that this false opinion of religion hath so great force among these young men and maidens of Mexico, that they will serve the Devil with so great rigor and austerity, which many of us do not in the service of the most high

God; the which is a great shame and confusion." Eng. trans., lib. 5, cap. 16.

² Toribio, *Hist. de los Indios*, MS., Parte 1, cap. 9.—Sahagun, *Hist. de Nueva-España*, lib. 2, *Apend.*; lib. 3, cap. 4-8.—Zurita, *Rapport*, pp. 123-126.—Acosta, lib. 5, cap. 15, 16.—Torquemada, *Monarch. Ind.*, lib. 9, cap. 11-14, 30, 31.—"They were taught," says the good father last cited, "to eschew vice, and cleave to virtue,—according to their notions of them; namely, to abstain from wrath, to offer violence and do wrong to no man,—in short, to perform the duties plainly pointed out by natural religion."

see, on the other. The inconsistency will not appear incredible to those who are familiar with the history of the Roman Catholic Church, in the early ages of the Inquisition.¹

The Mexican temples—*teocallis*, “houses of God,” as they were called²—were very numerous. There were several hundreds in each of the principal cities, many of them, doubtless, very humble edifices. They were solid masses of earth, cased with brick or stone, and in their form somewhat resembled the pyramidal structures of ancient Egypt. The bases of many of them were more than a hundred feet square, and they towered to a still greater height. They were distributed into four or five stories, each of smaller dimensions than that below. The ascent was by a flight of steps, at an angle of the pyramid, on the outside. This led to a sort of terrace or gallery, at the base of the second story, which passed quite round the building to another flight of stairs, commencing also at the same angle as the preceding and directly over it, and leading to a similar terrace; so that one had to make the circuit of the temple several times before reaching the summit. In some instances the stairway led directly up the centre of the western face of the building. The top was a broad area, on which were erected one or two towers, forty or fifty feet high, the sanctuaries in which stood the sacred images of the presiding deities. Before these towers stood the dreadful stone of sacrifice, and two lofty altars, on which fires were kept, as inextinguishable as those in the temple of Vesta. There were said to be six hundred of these altars, on smaller buildings within the enclosure of the great temple of Mexico, which, with those on the sacred edifices in other parts of the city, shed a brilliant illumination over its streets, through the darkest night.³

From the construction of their temples, all religious services were public. The long processions of priests winding round their massive sides, as they rose higher and higher towards the summit, and the dismal rites of sacrifice performed there, were all visible from the remotest corners of the capital, impressing on the spectator's mind a superstitious veneration for the mysteries of his religion, and for the dread ministers by whom they were interpreted.

This impression was kept in full force by their numerous festivals.

¹ Torquemada, Monarch. Ind., lib. 8, cap. 20, 21. —Camargo, Hist. de Tlascala, MS.—It is impossible not to be struck with the great resemblance, not merely in a few empty forms, but in the whole way of life, of the Mexican and Egyptian priesthood. Compare Herodotus (Euterpe, passim) and Diodorus (lib. 1, sec. 73, 81). The English reader may consult, for the same purpose, Heeren (Hist. Res., vol. v. chap. 2), Wilkinson (Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians (London, 1837), vol. i. pp. 257–279), the last writer especially,—who has contributed, more than all others, towards opening to us the interior of the social life of this interesting people.

² [Humboldt has noticed the curious similarity of the word *teocalli* with the Greek compound—actual or possible—*θεοκαλλα*; and Buschmann observes, “Die Uebereinstimmung des mex. *teotl* und *θεός*,

arithmetisch sehr hoch anzuschlagen wegen des Doppelvocals, zeigt wie weit es der Zufall in Wortähnlichkeiten zwischen ganz verschiedenen Sprachen bringen kann.” Ueber die aztekischen Ortsnamen, S. 627.—Ed.]

³ Rel. d'un gentil' huomo, ap. Ramusio, tom. iii. fol. 307.—Camargo, Hist. de Tlascala, MS.—Acosta, lib. 5, cap. 13.—Gomara, Crón., cap. 80, ap. Barcia, tom. ii.—Toribio, Hist. de los Indios, MS., Parte 1, cap. 4.—Carta del Lic. Zuazo, MS.—This last writer, who visited Mexico immediately after the Conquest, in 1521, assures us that some of the smaller temples, or pyramids, were filled with earth impregnated with odoriferous gums and gold dust; the latter sometimes in such quantities as probably to be worth a million of *castellanos*! (Ubi supra.) These were the temples of Mammon, indeed! But I find no confirmation of such golden reports.

Every month was consecrated to some protecting deity; and every week, nay, almost every day, was set down in their calendar for some appropriate celebration; so that it is difficult to understand how the ordinary business of life could have been compatible with the exactions of religion. Many of their ceremonies were of a light and cheerful complexion, consisting of the national songs and dances, in which both sexes joined. Processions were made of women and children crowned with garlands and bearing offerings of fruits, the ripened maize, or the sweet incense of copal and other odoriferous gums, while the altars of the deity were stained with no blood save that of animals.¹ These were the peaceful rites derived from their Toltec predecessors, on which the fierce Aztecs engrafted a superstition too loathsome to be exhibited in all its nakedness, and one over which I would gladly draw a veil altogether, but that it would leave the reader in ignorance of their most striking institution, and one that had the greatest influence in forming the national character.

Human sacrifices were adopted by the Aztecs early in the fourteenth century, about two hundred years before the Conquest.² Rare at first, they became more frequent with the wider extent of their empire; till, at length, almost every festival was closed with this cruel abomination. These religious ceremonials were generally arranged in such a manner as to afford a type of the most prominent circumstances in the character or history of the deity who was the object of them. A single example will suffice.

One of their most important festivals was that in honour of the god Tezcatlipoca, whose rank was inferior only to that of the Supreme Being. He was called "the soul of the world," and supposed to have been its creator. He was depicted as a handsome man, endowed with perpetual youth. A year before the intended sacrifice, a captive, distinguished for his personal beauty, and without a blemish on his body, was selected to represent this deity. Certain tutors took charge of him, and instructed him how to perform his new part with becoming grace and dignity. He was arrayed in a splendid dress, regaled with incense and with a profusion of sweet-scented flowers, of which the ancient Mexicans were as fond as their descendants at the present day. When he went abroad, he was attended by a train of the royal pages, and as he halted in the streets to play some favourite melody, the crowd prostrated themselves before him, and did him homage as the representative of their good deity. In this way he led an easy, luxurious life, till within a month of his sacrifice. Four beautiful girls, bearing the names of the principal goddesses, were then selected to share the honours of his bed; and with them he continued

¹ Cod. Tel.-Rem., Pl. 1, and Cod. Vat., passim, ap. Antiq. of Mexico, vols. i., vi.—Torquemada, Monarch. Ind., lib. 10, cap. 10, et seq.—Sahagun, Hist. de Nueva-España, lib. 2, passim.—Among the offerings, quails may be particularly noticed, for the incredible quantities of them sacrificed and consumed at many of the festivals.

² The traditions of their origin have somewhat of a fabulous tinge. But, whether true or false, they are equally indicative of unparalleled ferocity in the people who could be the subject of them. Clavigero, Stor. del Messico, tom. i. p. 167, et seq.; also Humboldt (who does not appear to doubt them), Vues des Cordillères, p. 95.

to live in idle dalliance, feasted at the banquets of the principal nobles, who paid him all the honours of a divinity.

At length the fatal day of sacrifice arrived. The term of his shortlived glories was at an end. He was stripped of his gaudy apparel, and bade adieu to the fair partners of his revelries. One of the royal barges transported him across the lake to a temple which rose on its margin, about a league from the city. Hither the inhabitants of the capital flocked, to witness the consummation of the ceremony. As the sad procession wound up the sides of the pyramid, the unhappy victim threw away his gay chaplets of flowers, and broke in pieces the musical instruments with which he had solaced the hours of captivity. On the summit he was received by six priests, whose long and matted locks flowed disorderly over their sable robes, covered with hieroglyphic scrolls of mystic import. They led him to the sacrificial stone, a huge block of jasper, with its upper surface somewhat convex. On this the prisoner was stretched. Five priests secured his head and his limbs; while the sixth, clad in a scarlet mantle, emblematic of his bloody office, dexterously opened the breast of the wretched victim with a sharp razor of *itszli*,—a volcanic substance, hard as flint,—and, inserting his hand in the wound, tore out the palpitating heart. The minister of death, first holding this up towards the sun, an object of worship throughout Anahuac, cast it at the feet of the deity to whom the temple was devoted, while the multitudes below prostrated themselves in humble adoration. The tragic story of this prisoner was expounded by the priests as the type of human destiny, which, brilliant in its commencement, too often closes in sorrow and disaster.¹

Such was the form of human sacrifice usually practised by the Aztecs. It was the same that often met the indignant eyes of the Europeans in their progress through the country, and from the dreadful doom of which they themselves were not exempted. There were, indeed, some occasions when preliminary tortures, of the most exquisite kind,—with which it is unnecessary to shock the reader,—were inflicted, but they always terminated with the bloody ceremony above described. It should be remarked, however, that such tortures were not the spontaneous suggestions of cruelty, as with the North American Indians, but were all rigorously prescribed in the Aztec ritual, and doubtless were often inflicted with the same compunctious visitings which a devout familiar of the Holy Office might at times experience in executing its stern decrees.² Women, as well as the

¹ Sahagun, Hist. de Nueva-España, lib. 2, cap. 2, 5, 24, et alibi.—Herrera, Hist. general, dec. 3, lib. 2, cap. 16.—Torquemada, Monarch. Ind., lib. 7, cap. 19; lib. 10, cap. 14.—Rel. d'un gentil' huomo, ap. Ramusio, tom. iii. fol. 307.—Acosta, lib. 5, cap. 9-21.—Carta del Lic. Zuazo, MS.—Relacion por el Regimiento de Vera Cruz (Julio, 1519), MS.—Few readers, probably, will sympathize with the sentence of Torquemada, who concludes his tale of woe by coolly dismissing "the soul of the victim, to sleep with those of his false gods, in hell!" Lib. 10, cap. 23.

² Sahagun, Hist. de Nueva-España, lib. 2, cap. 10, 29.—Gomara, Crón., cap. 219, ap. Barcia, tom. ii.—Toribio, Hist. de los Indios, MS., Parte 1, cap. 6-11.—The reader will find a tolerably exact picture of the nature of these tortures in the twenty-first canto of the "Inferno." The fantastic creations of the Florentine poet were nearly realized, at the very time he was writing, by the barbarians of an unknown world. One sacrifice, of a less revolting character, deserves to be mentioned. The Spaniards called it the "gladiatorial sacrifice," and it may remind one of the bloody games of antiquity. A

other sex, were sometimes reserved for sacrifice. On some occasions, particularly in seasons of drought, at the festival of the insatiable Tlaloc, the god of rain, children, for the most part infants, were offered up. As they were borne along in open litters, dressed in their festal robes, and decked with the fresh blossoms of spring, they moved the hardest heart to pity, though their cries were drowned in the wild chant of the priests, who read in their tears a favourable augury for their petition. These innocent victims were generally bought by the priests of parents who were poor, but who stifled the voice of nature, probably less at the suggestions of poverty than of a wretched superstition.¹

The most loathsome part of the story—the manner in which the body of the sacrificed captive was disposed of—remains yet to be told. It was delivered to the warrior who had taken him in battle, and by him, after being dressed, was served up in an entertainment to his friends. This was not the coarse repast of famished cannibals, but a banquet teeming with delicious beverages and delicate viands, prepared with art, and attended by both sexes, who, as we shall see hereafter, conducted themselves with all the decorum of civilized life. Surely, never were refinement and the extreme of barbarism brought so closely in contact with each other.²

Human sacrifices have been practised by many nations, not excepting the most polished nations of antiquity;³ but never by any, on a scale to be compared with those in Anahuac. The amount of victims immolated on its accursed altars would stagger the faith of the least scrupulous believer. Scarcely any author pretends to estimate the yearly sacrifices throughout the empire at less than twenty thousand, and some carry the number as high as fifty thousand!⁴

On great occasions, as the coronation of a king or the consecration of a temple, the number becomes still more appalling. At the dedication of the great temple of Huitzilopochtli, in 1486, the prisoners, who for some

captive of distinction was sometimes furnished with arms, and brought against a number of Mexicans in succession. If he defeated them all, as did occasionally happen, he was allowed to escape. If vanquished, he was dragged to the block and sacrificed in the usual manner. The combat was fought on a huge circular stone, before the assembled capital. Sahagun, *Hist. de Nueva-España*, lib. 2, cap. 21.—*Rel. d'un gentil'homme*, ap. Ramusio, tom. iii. fol. 305.

¹ Sahagun, *Hist. de Nueva-España*, lib. 2, cap. 1, 4, 21, et alibi.—Torquemada, *Monarch. Ind.*, lib. 10, cap. 10.—Clavigero, *Stor. del Messico*, tom. ii. pp. 76, 82.

² Carta del Lic. Zuazo, MS.—Torquemada, *Monarch. Ind.*, lib. 7, cap. 19.—Herrera, *Hist. general*, dec. 3, lib. 2, cap. 17.—Sahagun, *Hist. de Nueva-España*, lib. 2, cap. 21, et alibi.—Toribio, *Hist. de los Indios*, MS., Parte 1, cap. 2.

³ To say nothing of Egypt, where, notwithstanding the indications on the monuments, there is strong reason for doubting it. (Comp. Herodotus, *Euterpe*, sec. 45.) It was of frequent occurrence among the Greeks, as every schoolboy knows. In Rome, it was so common as to require to be interdicted by an express law, less than a hundred years before the Christian era,—a law recorded in a very honest strain of exultation by Pliny (*Hist. Nat.*, lib. 30,

sec. 3, 4); notwithstanding which, traces of the existence of the practice may be discerned to a much later period. See, among others, Horace, *Epod.*, In Canidiam.

⁴ See Clavigero, *Stor. del Messico*, tom. ii. p. 49.—Bishop Zumárraga, in a letter written a few years after the Conquest, states that 20,000 victims were yearly slaughtered in the capital. Torquemada turns this into 20,000 *infants*. (*Monarch. Ind.*, lib. 7, cap. 21.) Herrera, following Acosta, says 20,000 victims on a specified day of the year, throughout the kingdom. (*Hist. general*, dec. 2, lib. 2, cap. 16.) Clavigero, more cautious, infers that this number may have been sacrificed annually throughout Anahuac. (*Ubi supra*.) Las Casas, however, in his reply to Sepúlveda's assertion, that no one who had visited the New World put the number of yearly sacrifices at less than 20,000, declares that "this is the estimate of brigands, who wish to find an apology for their own atrocities, and that the real number was not above 50" (*Euvres*, ed. Llorente (Paris, 1822), tom. i. pp. 365, 386.) Probably the good Bishop's arithmetic here, as in most other instances, came more from his heart than his head. With such loose and contradictory data, it is clear that any specific number is mere conjecture, undeserving the name of calculation.

years had been reserved for the purpose, were drawn from all quarters to the capital. They were ranged in files, forming a procession nearly two miles long. The ceremony consumed several days, and seventy thousand captives are said to have perished at the shrine of this terrible deity! But who can believe that so numerous a body would have suffered themselves to be led unresistingly like sheep to the slaughter? Or how could their remains, too great for consumption in the ordinary way, be disposed of, without breeding a pestilence in the capital? Yet the event was of recent date, and is unequivocally attested by the best-informed historians.¹ One fact may be considered certain. It was customary to preserve the skulls of the sacrificed in buildings appropriated to the purpose. The companions of Cortés counted one hundred and thirty-six thousand in one of these edifices!² Without attempting a precise calculation, therefore, it is safe to conclude that thousands were yearly offered up, in the different cities of Anahuac, on the bloody altars of the Mexican divinities.³

Indeed, the great object of war, with the Aztecs, was quite as much to gather victims for their sacrifices as to extend their empire. Hence it was that an enemy was never slain in battle, if there were a chance of taking him alive. To this circumstance the Spaniards repeatedly owed their preservation. When Montezuma was asked "why he had suffered the republic of Tlascala to maintain her independence on his borders," he replied, "that she might furnish him with victims for his gods"! As the supply began to fail, the priests, the Dominicans of the New World, bellowed aloud for more, and urged on their superstitious sovereign by the denunciations of celestial wrath. Like the militant churchmen of Christendom in the Middle Ages, they mingled themselves in the ranks, and were conspicuous in the thickest of the fight, by their hideous aspect and frantic gestures. Strange, that, in every country, the most fiendish passions of the human heart have been those kindled in the name of religion!⁴

¹ I am within bounds. Torquemada states the number, most precisely, at 72,344 (Monarch. Ind., lib. 2, cap. 63); Ixtlilxochitl, with equal precision, at 80,400. (Hist. Chich., MS.) *¿Quien sabe?* The latter adds that the captives massacred in the capital, in the course of that memorable year, exceeded 100,000! (Loc. cit.) One, however, has to read but a little way, to find out that the science of numbers—at least where the party was not an eyewitness—is anything but an exact science with these ancient chroniclers. The Codex Telleriano-Remensis, written some fifty years after the Conquest, reduces the amount to 20,000. (Antiq. of Mexico, vol. i. Pl. 19; vol. vi. p. 141, Eng. note.) Even this hardly warrants the Spanish interpreter in calling king Ahuitzotl a man "of a mild and moderate disposition," *templada y benigna condición!* Ibid., vol. v. p. 49.

² Gomara states the number on the authority of two soldiers, whose names he gives, who took the trouble to count the grinning horrors in one of these Golgothas, where they were so arranged as to produce the most hideous effect. The existence of these conservatories is attested by every writer of the time.

³ The "Anonymous Conqueror" assures us, as a fact beyond dispute, that the Devil introduced him-

self into the bodies of the idols, and persuaded the silly priests that his only diet was human hearts! It furnishes a very satisfactory solution, to his mind, of the frequency of sacrifices in Mexico. Rel. d'un gentil' homme, ap. Ramusio, tom. iii. fol. 307.

⁴ The Tezucan priests would fain have persuaded the good king Nezahualcoyotl, on occasion of a pestilence, to appease the gods by the sacrifice of some of his own subjects, instead of his enemies; on the ground that they would not only be obtained more easily, but would be fresher victims, and more acceptable. (Ixtlilxochitl, Hist. Chich., MS., cap. 41.) This writer mentions a cool arrangement entered into by the allied monarchs with the republic of Tlascala and her confederates. A battlefield was marked out, on which the troops of the hostile nations were to engage at stated seasons, and thus supply themselves with subjects for sacrifice. The victorious party was not to pursue his advantage by invading the other's territory, and they were to continue, in all other respects, on the most amicable footing. (Ubi supra.) The historian, who follows in the track of the Tezucan Chronicler, may often find occasion to shelter himself, like Ariosto, with

"Mettendolo Turpin, lo metto anch' io."

The influence of these practices on the Aztec character was as disastrous as might have been expected. Familiarity with the bloody rites of sacrifice steeled the heart against human sympathy, and begat a thirst for carnage, like that excited in the Romans by the exhibitions of the circus. The perpetual recurrence of ceremonies, in which the people took part, associated religion with their most intimate concerns, and spread the gloom of superstition over the domestic hearth, until the character of the nation wore a grave and even melancholy aspect, which belongs to their descendants at the present day. The influence of the priesthood, of course, became unbounded. The sovereign thought himself honoured by being permitted to assist in the services of the temple. Far from limiting the authority of the priests to spiritual matters, he often surrendered his opinion to theirs, where they were least competent to give it. It was their opposition that prevented the final capitulation which would have saved the capital. The whole nation, from the peasant to the prince, bowed their necks to the worst kind of tyranny, that of a blind fanaticism.

In reflecting on the revolting usages recorded in the preceding pages, one finds it difficult to reconcile their existence with anything like a regular form of government, or an advance in civilization.¹ Yet the Mexicans had many claims to the character of a civilized community. One may, perhaps, better understand the anomaly, by reflecting on the condition of some of the most polished countries in Europe, in the sixteenth century, after the establishment of the modern Inquisition,—an institution which yearly destroyed its thousands, by a death more painful than the Aztec sacrifices; which armed the hand of brother against brother, and, setting its burning seal upon the lip, did more to stay the march of improvement than any other scheme ever devised by human cunning.

Human sacrifice, however cruel, has nothing in it degrading to its victim. It may be rather said to ennoble him by devoting him to the gods. Although so terrible with the Aztecs, it was sometimes voluntarily embraced by them, as the most glorious death, and one that opened a sure passage into paradise.² The Inquisition, on the other hand, branded its

¹ [Don José F. Ramirez, the distinguished Mexican scholar, has made this sentence the text for a disquisition of fifty pages or more, one object of which is to show that the existence of human sacrifices is not irreconcilable with an advance in civilization. This leads him into an argument of much length, covering a broad range of historical inquiry, and displaying much learning as well as a careful consideration of the subject. In one respect, however, he has been led into an important error by misunderstanding the drift of my remarks, where, speaking of cannibalism, I say, "It is impossible the people who practise it should make any great progress in moral or intellectual culture" (p. 41). This observation, referring solely to cannibalism, the critic cites as if applied by me to human sacrifices. Whatever force, therefore, his reasoning may have in respect to the latter, it cannot be admitted

to apply to the former. The distance is wide between human sacrifices and cannibalism; though Señor Ramirez diminishes this distance by regarding both one and the other simply as religious exercises, springing from the devotional principle in our nature.* He enforces his views by a multitude of examples from history, which show how extensively these revolting usages of the Aztecs—on a much less gigantic scale indeed—have been practised by the primitive races of the Old World, some of whom, at a later period, made high advances in civilization. Ramirez, *Notas y Esclarecimientos á la Historia del Conquista de México del Señor W. Prescott*, appended to Navarro's translation.]

² Rel. d'un gentil' huomo, ap. Ramusio, tom. iii. fol. 307.—Among other instances is that of Chimalpopoca, third king of Mexico, who doomed himself, with a number of his lords, to this death, to wipe off

* [The practice of eating, or tasting, the victim has been generally associated with sacrifice, from the idea either of the sacredness of the offering or of the deity's accepting the soul, the immaterial part, or the blood as containing the principle of life, and leaving the flesh to his worshippers.—Ed.]

victims with infamy in this world, and consigned them to everlasting perdition in the next.

One detestable feature of the Aztec superstition, however, sunk it far below the Christian. This was its cannibalism; though, in truth, the Mexicans were not cannibals in the coarsest acceptation of the term. They did not feed on human flesh merely to gratify a brutish appetite, but in obedience to their religion. Their repasts were made of the victims whose blood had been poured out on the altar of sacrifice. This is a distinction worthy of notice.¹ Still, cannibalism, under any form or whatever sanction, cannot but have a fatal influence on the nation addicted to it. It suggests ideas so loathsome, so degrading to man, to his spiritual and immortal nature, that it is impossible the people who practise it should make any great progress in moral or intellectual culture. The Mexicans furnish no exception to this remark. The civilization which they possessed descended from the Toltecs, a race who never stained their altars, still less their banquets, with the blood of man.² All that deserved the name of science in Mexico came from this source; and the crumbling ruins of edifices attributed to them, still extant in various parts of New Spain, show a decided superiority in their architecture over that of the later races of Anahuac. It is true, the Mexicans made great proficiency in many of the social and mechanic arts, in that material culture,—if I may so call it,—the natural growth of increasing opulence, which ministers to the gratification of the senses. In purely intellectual progress they were behind the Tezcucans, whose wise sovereigns came into the abominable rites of their neighbours with reluctance and practised them on a much more moderate scale.³

In this state of things, it was beneficently ordered by Providence that the land should be delivered over to another race, who would rescue it from the brutish superstitions that daily extended wider and wider with extent of empire.⁴ The debasing institutions of the Aztecs furnish the best apology for their conquest. It is true, the conquerors brought along with them the Inquisition. But they also brought Christianity, whose benign radiance would still survive when the fierce flames of fanaticism should be extinguished; dispelling those dark forms of horror which had so long brooded over the fair regions of Anahuac.

an indignity offered him by a brother monarch. (Torquemada, *Monarch. Ind.*, lib. 2, cap. 28.) This was the law of honour with the Aztecs.

¹ Voltaire, doubtless, intends this, when he says, "Ils n'étaient point anthropophages, comme un très-petit nombre de peuplades Américaines." (*Essai sur les Mœurs*, chap. 147.)

² [The remark in the text admits of some qualification. According to an ancient Tezcucan chronicler, quoted by Señor Ramirez, the Toltecs celebrated occasionally the worship of the god Tlaloc with human sacrifices. The most important of these was the offering up once a year of five or six maidens, who were immolated in the usual horrid way of tearing out their hearts. It does not appear that the Toltecs consummated the sacrifice by devouring the flesh of the victim. This seems to have been the only exception to the blameless character of the

Toltec rites. Tlaloc was the oldest deity in the Aztec mythology in which he found a suitable place. Yet, as the knowledge of him was originally derived from the Toltecs, it cannot be denied that this people, as Ramirez says, possessed in their peculiar civilization the germs of those sanguinary institutions which existed on so appalling a scale in Mexico. See Ramirez, *Notas y Esclarecimientos*, ubi supra.]

³ Ixtlilxochitl, *Hist. Chich.*, MS., cap. 45, et alibi.

⁴ No doubt the ferocity of character engendered by their sanguinary rites greatly facilitated their conquests. Machiavelli attributes to a similar cause, in part, the military successes of the Romans. (*Discorsi sopra T. Livio*, lib. 2, cap. 2.) The same chapter contains some ingenious reflections—much more ingenious than candid—on the opposite tendencies of Christianity.

The most important authority in the preceding chapter, and, indeed, wherever the Aztec religion is concerned, is Bernardino de Sahagun, a Franciscan friar, contemporary with the Conquest. His great work, *Historia universal de Nueva-España*, has been recently printed for the first time. The circumstances attending its compilation and subsequent fate form one of the most remarkable passages in literary history.

Sahagun was born in a place of the same name, in old Spain. He was educated at Salamanca, and, having taken the vows of St. Francis, came over as a missionary to Mexico in the year 1529. Here he distinguished himself by his zeal, the purity of his life, and his unwearied exertions to spread the great truths of religion among the natives. He was the guardian of several conventual houses, successively, until he relinquished these cares, that he might devote himself more unreservedly to the business of preaching, and of compiling various works designed to illustrate the antiquities of the Aztecs. For these literary labours he found some facilities in the situation which he continued to occupy, of reader, or lecturer, in the College of Santa Cruz, in the capital.

The "Universal History" was concocted in a singular manner. In order to secure to it the greatest possible authority, he passed some years in a Tezucan town, where he conferred daily with a number of respectable natives unacquainted with Castilian. He propounded to them queries, which they, after deliberation, answered in their usual method of writing, by hieroglyphical paintings. These he submitted to other natives, who had been educated under his own eye in the College of Santa Cruz; and the latter, after a consultation among themselves, gave a written version, in the Mexican tongue, of the hieroglyphics. This process he repeated in another place, in some part of Mexico, and subjected the whole to a still further revision by a third body in another quarter. He finally arranged the combined results into a regular history, in the form it now bears; composing it in the Mexican language, which he could both write and speak with great accuracy and elegance,—greater, indeed, than any Spaniard of the time.

The work presented a mass of curious information, that attracted much attention among his brethren. But they feared its influence in keeping alive in the natives a too vivid reminiscence of the very superstitions which it was the great object of the Christian clergy to eradicate. Sahagun had views more liberal than those of his order, whose blind zeal would willingly have annihilated every monument of art and human ingenuity which had not been produced under the influence of Christianity. They refused to allow him the necessary aid to transcribe his papers, which he had been so many years in preparing, under the pretext that the expense was too great for their order to incur. This occasioned a further delay of several years. What was worse, his provincial got possession of his manuscripts, which were soon scattered among the different religious houses in the country.

In this forlorn state of his affairs, Sahagun drew up a brief statement of the nature and contents of his work, and forwarded it to Madrid. It fell into the hands of Don Juan de Ovando, president of the Council for the Indies, who was so much interested in it that he ordered the manuscripts to be restored to their author, with the request that he would at once set about translating them into Castilian. This was accordingly done. His papers were recovered, though not without the menace of ecclesiastical censures; and the octogenarian author began the work of translation from the Mexican, in which they had been originally written by him thirty years before. He had the satisfaction to complete the task, arranging the Spanish version in a parallel column with the original, and adding a vocabulary, explaining the difficult Aztec terms and phrases; while the text was supported by the numerous paintings on which it was founded. In this form, making two bulky volumes in folio, it was sent to Madrid. There seemed now to be no further reason for postponing its publication, the importance of which could not be doubted. But from this moment it disappears; and we hear nothing further of it, for more than two centuries, except only as a valuable work, which had once existed, and was probably buried in some one of the numerous cemeteries of learning in which Spain abounds.

At length, towards the close of the last century, the indefatigable Muñoz succeeded in

disinterring the long-lost manuscript from the place tradition had assigned to it,—the library of a convent at Tolosa, in Navarre, the northern extremity of Spain. With his usual ardour, he transcribed the whole work with his own hands, and added it to the inestimable collection, of which, alas ! he was destined not to reap the full benefit himself. From this transcript Lord Kingsborough was enabled to procure the copy which was published in 1830, in the sixth volume of his magnificent compilation. In it he expresses an honest satisfaction at being the first to give Sahagun's work to the world. But in this supposition he was mistaken. The very year preceding, an edition of it, with annotations, appeared in Mexico, in three volumes octavo. It was prepared by Bustamante,—a scholar to whose editorial activity his country is largely indebted,—from a copy of the Muñoz manuscript which came into his possession. Thus this remarkable work, which was denied the honours of the press during the author's lifetime, after passing into oblivion, reappeared, at the distance of nearly three centuries, not in his own country, but in foreign lands widely remote from each other, and that almost simultaneously. The story is extraordinary, though unhappily not so extraordinary in Spain as it would be elsewhere.

Sahagun divided his history into twelve books. The first eleven are occupied with the social institutions of Mexico, and the last with the Conquest. On the religion of the country he is particularly full. His great object evidently was, to give a clear view of its mythology, and of the burdensome ritual which belonged to it. Religion entered so intimately into the most private concerns and usages of the Aztecs, that Sahagun's work must be a text-book for every student of their antiquities. Torquemada availed himself of a manuscript copy, which fell into his hands before it was sent to Spain, to enrich his own pages,—a circumstance more fortunate for his readers than for Sahagun's reputation, whose work, now that it is published, loses much of the originality and interest which would otherwise attach to it. In one respect it is invaluable ; as presenting a complete collection of the various forms of prayer, accommodated to every possible emergency, in use by the Mexicans. They are often clothed in dignified and beautiful language, showing that sublime speculative tenets are quite compatible with the most degrading practices of superstition. It is much to be regretted that we have not the eighteen hymns inserted by the author in his book, which would have particular interest, as the only specimen of devotional poetry preserved of the Aztecs. The hieroglyphical paintings, which accompanied the text, are also missing. If they have escaped the hands of fanaticism, both may reappear at some future day.

Sahagun produced several other works of a religious or philological character. Some of these were voluminous, but none have been printed. He lived to a very advanced age, closing a life of activity and usefulness, in 1590, in the capital of Mexico. His remains were followed to the tomb by a numerous concourse of his own countrymen, and of the natives, who lamented in him the loss of unaffected piety, benevolence, and learning.

CHAPTER IV.

MEXICAN HIEROGLYPHICS.—MANUSCRIPTS.—ARITHMETIC.—CHRONOLOGY.
—ASTRONOMY.

It is a relief to turn from the gloomy pages of the preceding chapter to a brighter side of the picture, and to contemplate the same nation in its generous struggle to raise itself from a state of barbarism and to take a positive rank in the scale of civilization. It is not the less interesting, that these efforts were made on an entirely new theatre of action, apart

from those influences that operate in the Old World; the inhabitants of which, forming one great brotherhood of nations, are knit together by sympathies that make the faintest spark of knowledge, struck out in one quarter, spread gradually wider and wider, until it has diffused a cheering light over the remotest. It is curious to observe the human mind, in this new position, conforming to the same laws as on the ancient continent, and taking a similar direction in its first inquiries after truth,—so similar, indeed, as, although not warranting, perhaps, the idea of imitation, to suggest at least that of a common origin.

In the Eastern hemisphere we find some nations, as the Greeks, for instance, early smitten with such a love of the beautiful as to be unwilling to dispense with it even in the graver productions of science; and other nations, again, proposing a severer end to themselves, to which even imagination and elegant art were made subservient. The productions of such a people must be criticised, not by the ordinary rules of taste, but by their adaptation to the peculiar end for which they were designed. Such were the Egyptians in the Old World,¹ and the Mexicans in the New. We have already had occasion to notice the resemblance borne by the latter nation to the former in their religious economy. We shall be more struck with it in their scientific culture, especially their hieroglyphical writing and their astronomy.

To describe actions and events by delineating visible objects seems to be a natural suggestion, and is practised, after a certain fashion, by the rudest savages. The North American Indian carves an arrow on the bark of trees to show his followers the direction of his march, and some other sign to show the success of his expeditions. But to paint intelligibly a consecutive series of these actions—forming what Warburton has happily called *picture-writing*²—requires a combination of ideas that amounts to a positively intellectual effort. Yet further, when the object of the painter, instead of being limited to the present, is to penetrate the past, and to gather from its dark recesses lessons of instruction for coming generations, we see the dawnings of a literary culture, and recognize the proof of a decided civilization in the attempt itself, however imperfectly it may be executed. The literal imitation of objects will not answer for this more complex and extended plan. It would occupy too much space, as well as time in the execution. It then becomes necessary to abridge the pictures, to confine the drawing to outlines, or to such prominent parts of the bodies delineated as may readily suggest the whole. This is the *representative* or *figurative* writing, which forms the lowest stage of hieroglyphics.

¹ "An Egyptian temple," says Denon, strikingly, "is an open volume, in which the teachings of science, morality, and the arts are recorded. Everything seems to speak one and the same language, and breathes one and the same spirit." The passage is cited by Heeren, *Hist. Res.*, vol. v. p. 178.

² *Divine Legation*, ap. *Works* (London, 1811), vol. iv. b. 4, sec. 4.—The Bishop of Gloucester, in

his comparison of the various hieroglyphical systems of the world, shows his characteristic sagacity and boldness by announcing opinions little credited then, though since established. He affirmed the existence of an Egyptian alphabet, but was not aware of the phonetic property of hieroglyphics,—the great literary discovery of our age.

But there are things which have no type in the material world ; abstract ideas, which can only be represented by visible objects supposed to have some quality analogous to the idea intended. This constitutes *symbolical* writing, the most difficult of all to the interpreter, since the analogy between the material and immaterial object is often purely fanciful, or local in its application. Who, for instance, could suspect the association which made a beetle represent the universe, as with the Egyptians, or a serpent typify time, as with the Aztecs ?

The third and last division is the *phonetic*, in which signs are made to represent sounds, either entire words, or parts of them. This is the nearest approach of the hieroglyphical series to that beautiful invention, the alphabet, by which language is resolved into its elementary sounds, and an apparatus supplied for easily and accurately expressing the most delicate shades of thought:

The Egyptians were well skilled in all three kinds of hieroglyphics. But, although their public monuments display the first class, in their ordinary intercourse and written records, it is now certain that they almost wholly relied on the phonetic character. Strange that, having thus broken down the thin partition which divided them from an alphabet, their latest monuments should exhibit no nearer approach to it than their earliest.¹ The Aztecs, also, were acquainted with the several varieties of hieroglyphics. But they relied on the figurative infinitely more than on the others. The Egyptians were at the top of the scale, the Aztecs at the bottom.

In casting the eye over a Mexican manuscript, or map, as it is called, one is struck with the grotesque caricatures it exhibits of the human figure ; monstrous, overgrown heads, on puny, misshapen bodies, which are themselves hard and angular in their outlines, and without the least skill in composition. On closer inspection, however, it is obvious that it is not so much a rude attempt to delineate nature, as a conventional symbol, to express the idea in the most clear and forcible manner ; in the same way as the pieces of similar value on a chessboard, while they correspond with one another in form, bear little resemblance, usually, to the objects they represent. Those parts of the figure are most distinctly traced which are the most important. So, also, the colouring, instead of the delicate gradations of nature, exhibits only gaudy and violent contrasts, such as may produce the most vivid impression. "For even colours," as Gama observes, "speak in the Aztec hieroglyphics."²

But in the execution of all this the Mexicans were much inferior to the Egyptians. The drawings of the latter, indeed, are exceedingly defective,

¹ It appears that the hieroglyphics on the most recent monuments of Egypt contain no larger infusion of phonetic characters than those which existed eighteen centuries before Christ ; showing no advance, in this respect, for twenty-two hundred years ! (See Champollion, *Précis du Système hiéroglyphique des anciens Egyptiens* (Paris, 1824), pp. 242, 281.) It may seem more strange that the enchorial alphabet, so much more commodious, should not

have been substituted. But the Egyptians were familiar with their hieroglyphics from infancy, which, moreover, took the fancies of the most illiterate, probably in the same manner as our children are attracted and taught by the picture-alphabets in an ordinary spelling-book.

² Descripción histórica y cronológica de las Dos Piedras (México, 1832), Parte 2, p. 39.

when criticised by the rules of art ; for they were as ignorant of perspective as the Chinese, and only exhibited the head in profile, with the eye in the centre, and with total absence of expression. But they handled the pencil more gracefully than the Aztecs, were more true to the natural forms of objects, and, above all, showed great superiority in abridging the original figure by giving only the outline, or some characteristic or essential feature. This simplified the process, and facilitated the communication of thought. An Egyptian text has almost the appearance of alphabetical writing in its regular lines of minute figures. A Mexican text looks usually like a collection of pictures, each one forming the subject of a separate study. This is particularly the case with the delineations of mythology ; in which the story is told by a conglomeration of symbols, that may remind one more of the mysterious anaglyphs sculptured on the temples of the Egyptians, than of their written records.

The Aztecs had various emblems for expressing such things as, from their nature, could not be directly represented by the painter ; as, for example, the years, months, days, the seasons, the elements, the heavens, and the like. A "tongue" denoted speaking ; a "footprint," travelling ; a "man sitting on the ground," an earthquake. These symbols were often very arbitrary, varying with the caprice of the writer ; and it requires a nice discrimination to interpret them, as a slight change in the form or position of the figure intimated a very different meaning.¹ An ingenious writer asserts that the priests devised secret symbolic characters for the record of their religious mysteries. It is possible. But the researches of Champollion lead to the conclusion that the similar opinion formerly entertained respecting the Egyptian hieroglyphics is without foundation.²

Lastly, they employed, as above stated, phonetic signs, though these were chiefly confined to the names of persons and places ; which, being derived from some circumstance or characteristic quality, were accommodated to the hieroglyphical system. Thus, the town *Cimatlan* was compounded of *imatl*, a "root," which grew near it, and *tlán*, signifying "near ;" *Tlaxcallan* meant "the place of bread," from its rich fields of corn ; *Huexotzinco*, "a place surrounded by willows." The names of persons were often significant of their adventures and achievements. That of the great Tezcucan prince Nezahualcoyotl signified "hungry fox," intimating his sagacity, and his distresses in early life.³ The emblems of such names

¹ Gama, Descripción, Parte 2, pp. 32, 44.—Acosta, lib. 6, cap. 7.—The continuation of Gama's work, recently edited by Bustamante, in Mexico, contains, among other things, some interesting remarks on the Aztec hieroglyphics. The editor has rendered a good service by this further publication of the writings of this estimable scholar, who has done more than any of his countrymen to explain the mysteries of Aztec science.

² Gama, Descripción, Parte 2, p. 32.—Warburton, with his usual penetration, rejects the idea of mystery in the figurative hieroglyphics. (Divine Legation, s. 4, sec. 4.) If there was any mystery reserved for the initiated, Champollion thinks it may have been the

system of the anaglyphs. (Précis, p. 360.) Why may not this be true, likewise, of the monstrous symbolical combinations which represented the Mexican deities?

³ Boturini, Idea, pp. 77-83.—Gama, Descripción, Parte 2, pp. 34-43.—Heeren is not aware, or does not allow, that the Mexicans used phonetic characters of any kind. (Hist. Res., vol. v. p. 45.) They, indeed, reversed the usual order of proceeding, and, instead of adapting the hieroglyphic to the name of the object, accommodated the name of the object to the hieroglyphic. This, of course, could not admit of great extension. We find phonetic characters, however, applied in some instances to common as well as proper names.